AMERICAN CERAMICS 4/4

MARK BURNS
A DECADE IN PENNSYLVANIA: 1975–1985

FEBRUARY 8–MARCH 23, 1986
THE SOCIETY FOR ART IN CRAFTS
719 ALLEGHENY RIVER BOULEVARD
VERONA, PA 412/828-6121

EXHIBITION COURTESY
HELEN DRUTT GALLERY
1721 WALNUT STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103
215/735-1625

HOURS: WEDNESDAY–SATURDAY 11–5
MONDAY & TUESDAY BY APPOINTMENT

HELEN DRUTT

MARK BURNS, 1985
"CAUGHT BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG"
EARTHENWARE, POLYCHROME SURFACES, WOOD
39" H. x 29" W. x 9½" D.
(NOT IN EXHIBITION)

MARK BURNS, 1981
"SANDMAN"
EARTHENWARE, PAINT, GLITTER
20" H. x 14" W. x 14" D.
COLLECTION OF
ROBERT L. PFANNEBECKER, PA

MARK BURNS, 1975–76
"PAGODA"
SOUP TUREEN
EARTHENWARE, GLAZE, PAINT, PAPER, WOOD
15" H. x 16" W. x 12" D.
COLLECTION OF
ROBERT L. PFANNEBECKER, PA

Dorothy Weiss Gallery

February

British Ceramics
Alison Britton
Susan Barrow
Linda Gunn Russell
Richard Slee
Angus Suttie

March

Jamie Walker
Ceramic Work

April

Jay Kvapil
Sculpture

Hitoshi Sasaki
Wall Sculptures

256 Sutter Street
San Francisco CA 94108
415 397 3611

Susan & Steven Kemenyffy

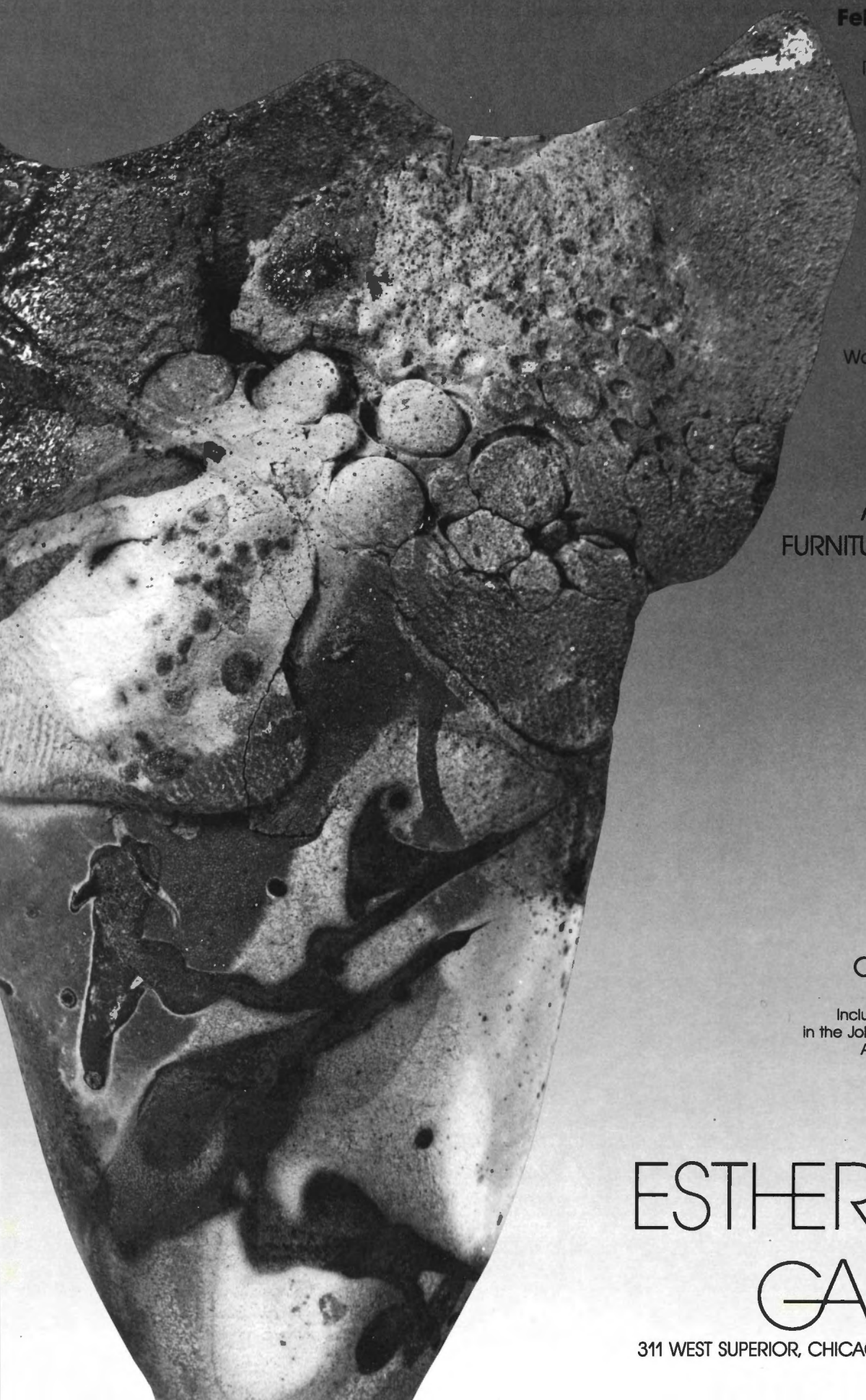
Images on Clay-Raku

"A Sunday Night Study/Clay Space"
(1985), india ink

March 1–23

Pittsburgh Center for the Arts
Mellon Park
6300 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15232

PAUL SOLDNER



February 14–March 18

Recent Work in Ceramics

February 14–March 18

JANET MARKARIAN
Recent
Wood & Fiber Constructions

March 21–April 26

A RENAISSANCE IN
FURNITURE AS ART; PART II

GARRY KNOX BENNETT
JAMES GEIER
WENDY MARUYAMA
JUDY McKIE
NORMAN PETERSEN
MITCH RYERSON
HOWARD WERNER

March 21–April 26

RON FONDAW

AURORE CHABOT
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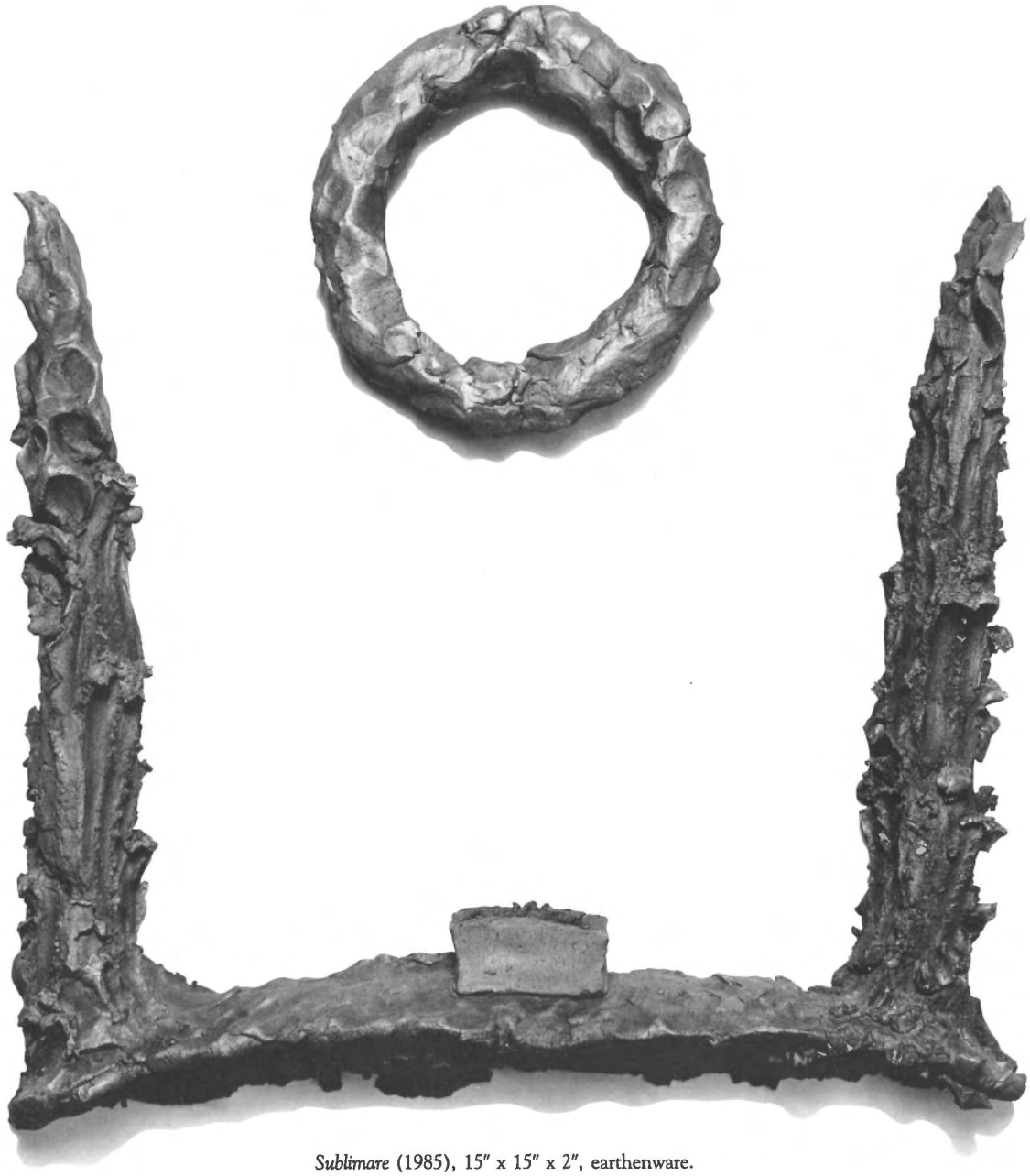
Including work recently completed
in the John Michael Kohler Arts Center's
Arts/Industry Residency Program

ESTHER SAKS GALLERY

311 WEST SUPERIOR, CHICAGO IL 60610, 312.751.0911

Christina Bertoni



Sublimare (1985), 15″ x 15″ x 2″, earthenware.

Future Exhibitions

Works by Christina Bertoni have been selected for the following exhibitions:

Material as Metaphor (February–March 1986),
Chicago Public Library Cultural Center (catalogue).
American Potters Today (May 1986),
Victoria and Albert Museum, London (catalogue).
The Eloquent Object (Opens October 1987),
Philbrook Art Center, then travels to Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston; Oakland Museum of Fine Arts; Chicago Public Library Cultural Center; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (catalogue).

In New York

Mary Jo Bole
Dennis Gallagher
Arthur González
Jan Holcomb
Michael Lucero
Judy Moonelis
Ron Nagle
Arlene Shechet
Nancy Smith
Peter VandenBerge
Peter Voulkos
William Wyman

Maria Friedrich

By appointment only 718 438 3040

The Ceramic Art Quarterly
Volume 4, Number 4

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Cover: Inspired by Jeff Perrone's hypothesis that ceramics is not a unified whole, but rather a number of discrete parts, the model of the shard seemed apt for an issue devoted to criticism. For the contemporary ceramist is no humble artisan; s/he is a sophisticated artist, drawing upon sources as rich and as diverse as the entire history of art. We can imagine historians of the future poring over these 20th-century shards — from the works of Viola Frey, Adrian Saxe, Betty Woodman, and Arnold Zimmerman — trying to puzzle out their sources, their meanings. Future archaeologists will no doubt sift through these fragments, just as earlier scholars pondered the shards of Greek or Mimbres pottery, in search of clues to the character of a civilization. Photo: Brad Guice.

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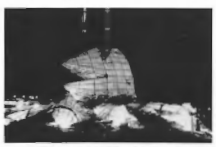

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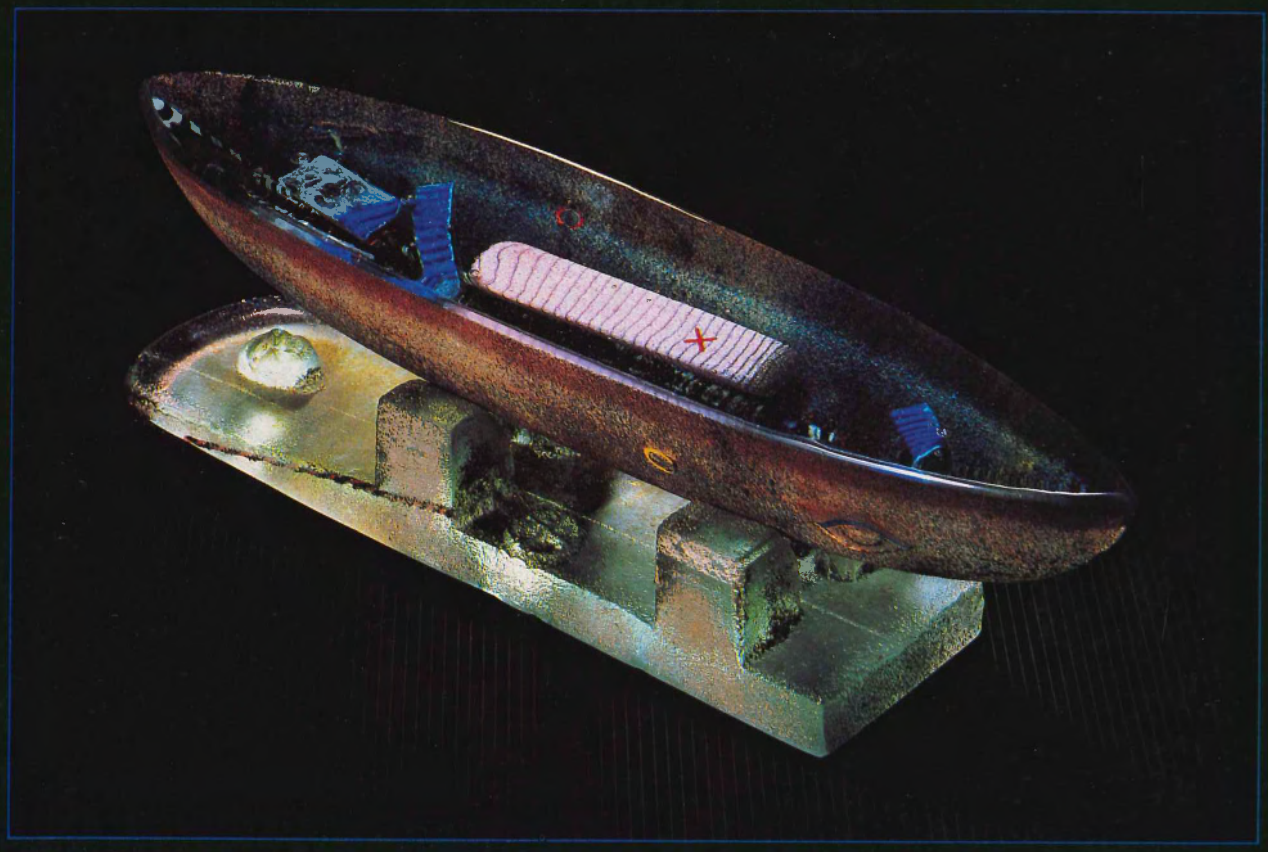
BERTIL VALLIEN



Chosen Bar (1985), 20″ long
Photo: Robert Vinnedge

Kate Elliott
Contemporary Glass

P.O. Box 5447
Scottsdale, Arizona 85261
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Criticism and Clay

Why has there been so little good writing on ceramic art? That question, posed to me again and again, caused the publisher and I to found *American Ceramics* magazine five years ago. Ceramic art defies easy categorization — it steps over the boundaries between fine art, design, industry, and craft — and for that reason, it seems to elude understanding.

But contemporary ceramic art, as we think of it in modern terms, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Five years ago, ceramics could claim only a handful of galleries, a few devoted collectors, and almost no spokespersons. Happily, that is changing; but the question remains: what can we do to improve the criticism of this medium?

To begin to correct this problem, critic Jeff Kelley approached me more than a year ago with the proposal to hold a conference devoted to the subject, "Criticism and Clay: Past Models, Future Shapes." The Sun Valley Center for the Arts and Humanities offered to sponsor the conference, which took place this past July, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Idaho Commission on the Arts.

Assembled there in Sun Valley, critics, artists, and dealers devoted three days to intense speculation on the state of clay criticism. Among the participants were critics John Perreault, a regular contributor to *Artforum* and the *Village Voice;* Jeff Perrone, whose writing is most often published in *Arts* and *Artforum;* Jeff Kelley, who has written for *Artforum, Artweek,* and the *Los Angeles Times;* and myself; San Francisco gallery owner Rena Bransten; artists Viola Frey and Jim Romberg; as well as a number of other artists and writers. So that our deliberations would reach a wider audience than those able to come to Sun Valley, I decided to publish the conference results in *American Ceramics* as part of a special issue devoted to clay criticism.

A number of important insights came to light during those three days, which you will be able to read in this issue. John Perreault strongly urges clay artists to be more *ambitious*, to measure themselves against, not only other ceramists, but against great artists of all genres and all ages. He says it's time to break the mold of technical, biographical, and inspirational writing that dominates the medium.

Jeff Perrone attacks the symmetrical, centered unity of the vessel as illusory, arguing that in fact there is no single center, and proposes instead the eccentric, fragmented sherd as a more appropriate model for ceramic art. Jeff Kelley decries the tendency of today's pots to be placed on pedestals as objects for display, removed from everyday life, and calls for potters to reanimate their vessels by again making them part of private or public rituals. A running dialogue ensued among the panelists and the audience throughout the conference, and some highlights of these often passionate, sometimes lighthearted discussions are excerpted here in "Criticism and Clay: Past Models, Future Shapes."

In addition to these ruminations, I invited two of our best writers, Edward Lebow and Janet Koplos, to add their insights on the process of criticism. Lebow chides us for thinking of criticism as judgments of good or bad. It is more important, says he, for the critic to sift carefully through the evidence at hand — both the object itself and the goals of the artist — in order to get to the heart of the piece and to pass on these insights to the reader. Koplos, who devoted her Master's thesis to a thorough examination of craft criticism, here challenges clay critics to widen their horizons, to expand their vocabulary beyond the confines of craft, to learn from the best writers in other fields, and to apply the analysis of painting or sculpture to clay.

It is time we discarded the idea of a Clay Movement. The medium is immaterial. It is only when craft is dominant, when the hand is more in evidence than the mind, that ceramics is a minor art.

To my mind, the term "clay criticism" is innacurate, even meaningless. There *is* critical writing, which may have as its subject music or poetry or pottery. But the keen perception, the knowledge, the writing skills — these are common to all good critics, no matter what their subject. What is unique to each critic is a point of view, a vision. The critic gives us the benefit of his eyes and his insight; if she is a good historian or journalist, she also gives us knowledge we ourselves do not possess.

What must be done to foster good writing about clay? We must have more — and better — exhibitions of ceramics in galleries and museums. We must establish positions in universities and art schools for the history of ceramic art. We must insist that art and craft magazines seek out and develop critics who are capable of writing insightfully about this medium.

Speaking personally, what I most value about my role as editor of *American Ceramics* is finding, developing, and working with writers across the country. They now number over 140. I have found them in studios, in universities, in museums. And, I've discovered, there are a number of fine art critics extremely interested in clay who simply lacked a forum in which to publish their ideas. *American Ceramics* was founded to provide that forum. I hope the contributors to this and other issues of the magazine will help to encourage better writing. If we succeed, you may well be able to read criticism about clay in every art magazine.

Michael McTwigan

Ted Randall 1914 – 1985

I never knew Ted Randall well, but friends of mine did. Once a week they would drive to his studio outside Alfred, New York and hunt big game: the ontological question. He'd stalk it one week with Buckminster Fuller, the next with Susanne Langer. He glimpsed it in jazz, in the "ferment" of the 1930s, in Carl Jung, Herbert Read, and Jean Piaget. He kept good topics and company. His graduate seminars moved through high weeds, stalking and missing, discussing not solving. I was lucky enough to have snuck in once, and remember Ted's conviction that there was no shame in getting lost, only in failing to seek. It seemed then that he did most of the seeking, and had paused a moment to tell us what he had found.

The broader community will remember Ted Randall for his solutions—his work in founding N.C.E.C.A., his potter's wheels and kiln designs, his fifteen- year guidance of the art and design program at Alfred University, and his studio work. His last ten years were devoted to studio production and...yes, golf. He spent mornings on the greens, afternoons in the studio behind his house.

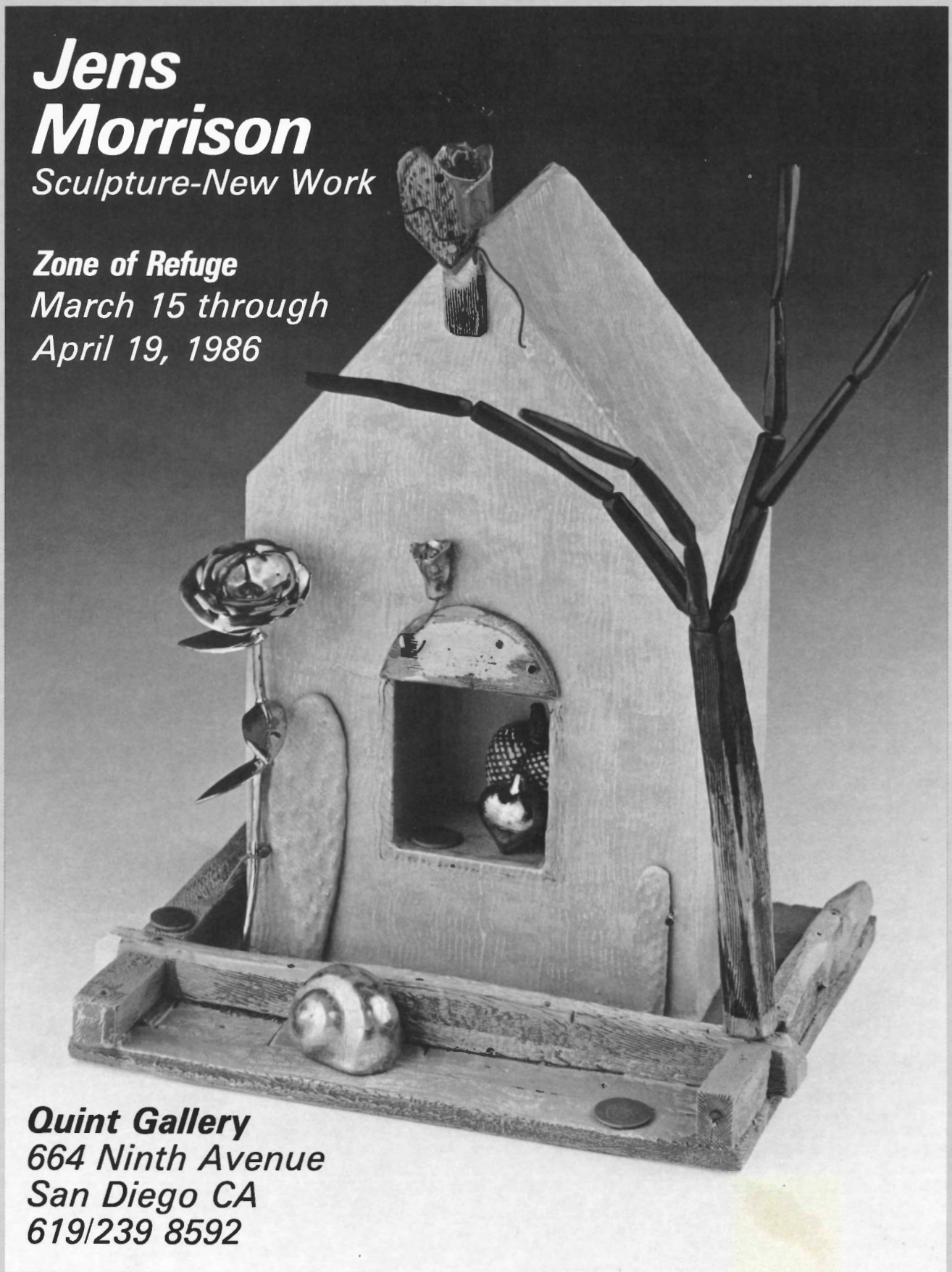
When I saw him last June, he wondered what was going on "out there?" Whom had I seen? And what did they think? Ceramics had changed dramatically since he first set out to live by his work in the early fifties. He wondered whether the market would sustain the changes, and whether the changes deserved support. It was just another stage in the evolution—the synthesis—of pottery, he told me. I nodded, and he plunged into a discourse on that evolution. He mentioned Piaget and the ontological question, glancing up occasionally to say, "Don't you see?" And I did, we all did. Always the teacher, he wanted us to see. For that, and more, he will be missed.

Edward Lebow

Jens Morrison

Sculpture-New Work

Zone of Refuge
March 15 through
April 19, 1986



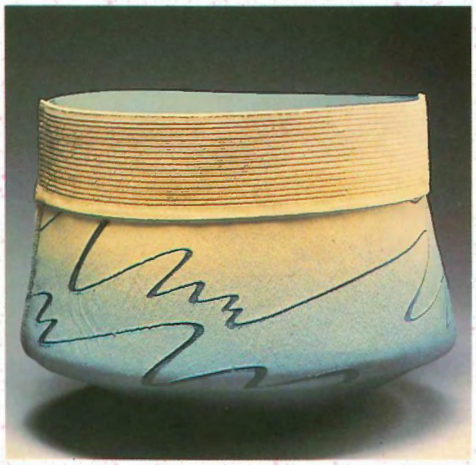
Quint Gallery
664 Ninth Avenue
San Diego CA
619/239 8592

Casa de la Viaje *(1985), 22" x 15" x 12".* *Photo: Bob Nishihira*

The Teabowl
Boyden, Coleman, Duckworth, Glick, Hoard, Lou, MacKenzie, Mather, Pharis, Roehm, Salvin...

Martha Schneider Gallery

2055 Green Bay Road
Highland Park IL 60035
312/433 4420



Jamie Fine
February 15–March 13

Paula Rice
March 15–April 15

Don Reitz

Lynn Turner
April 17–May 15

Susanne Stephenson

Contemporary Ceramics

For the Discerning Collector

Sandra Ainsley Artforms
Hazelton Lanes, 55 Avenue Road
Toronto, Ontario M5R 3L2
(416) 968-8685

America House Gallery
24 Washington Avenue
Tenafly, New Jersey 07670
(201) 569-2526

Clay and Fiber
North Pueblo Road
Taos, New Mexico 87571
(505) 758-8093

Departure Gallery
360 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, New York 10024
(212) 580-7454

Elements Gallery
14 Liberty Way
Greenwich, Connecticut 06830
(203) 661-0014

Gallery Eight
7464 Girard Avenue
La Jolla, California 92037
(619) 454-9781

Incorporated Gallery
1200 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10128
(212) 831-4466

Sheila Nussbaum Gallery
358 Millburn Avenue
Millburn, New Jersey 07041
(201) 467-1720

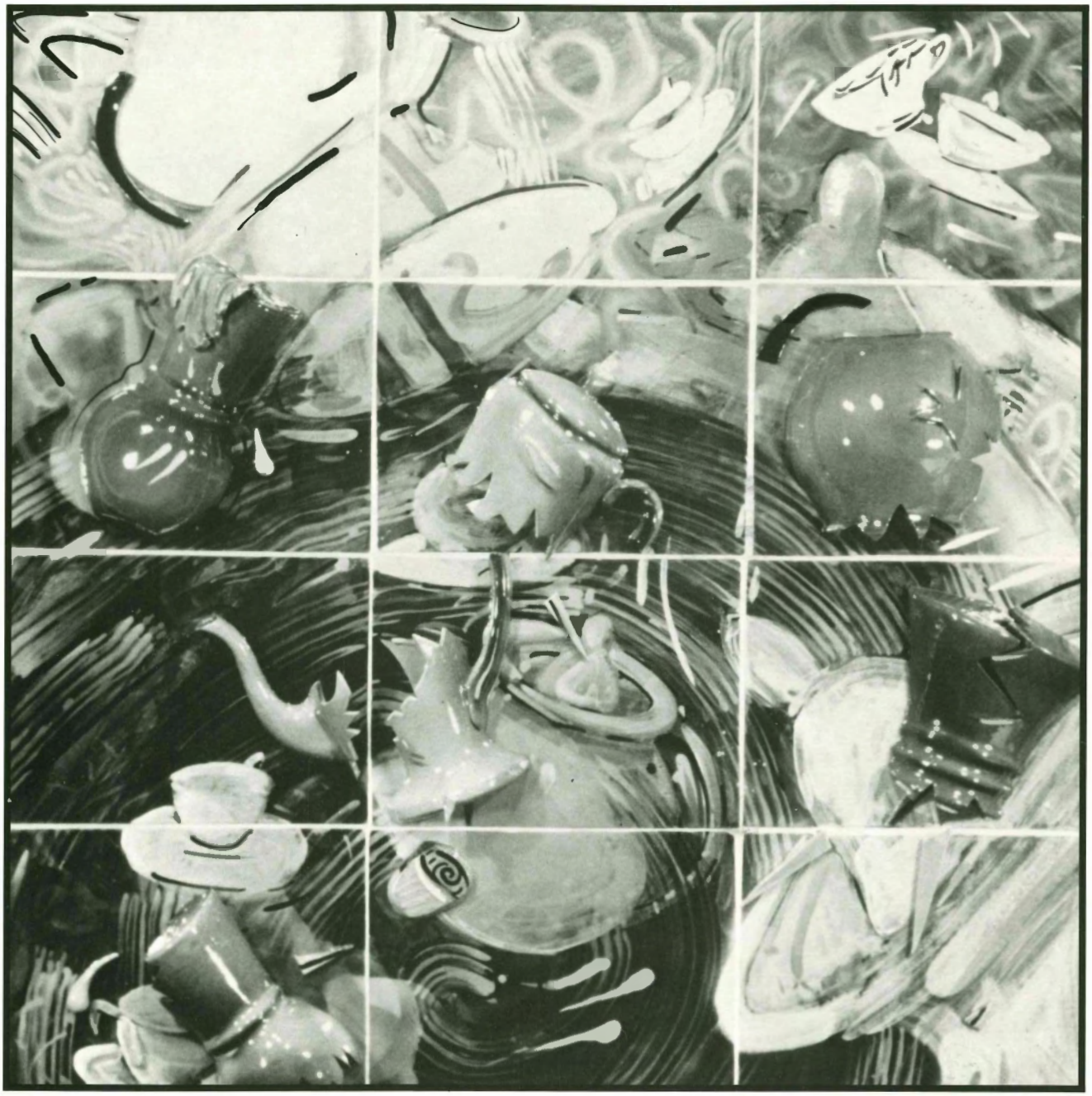
The Private Collection
21 East 5 Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
(513) 381-1667

Swan Gallery
8433 Germantown Avenue
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19118
(215) 242-5300

Swan Gallery
132 South 18 Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103
(215) 568-9898

Venture Gallery
28235 Southfield Road
Lathrup, Michigan 48076
(313) 552-1151

STEVENDONEGAN



"VORTEX" 1985

GLAZED CERAMIC RELIEF

April 5 - 26
Opening April 5, 6 - 9p.m.

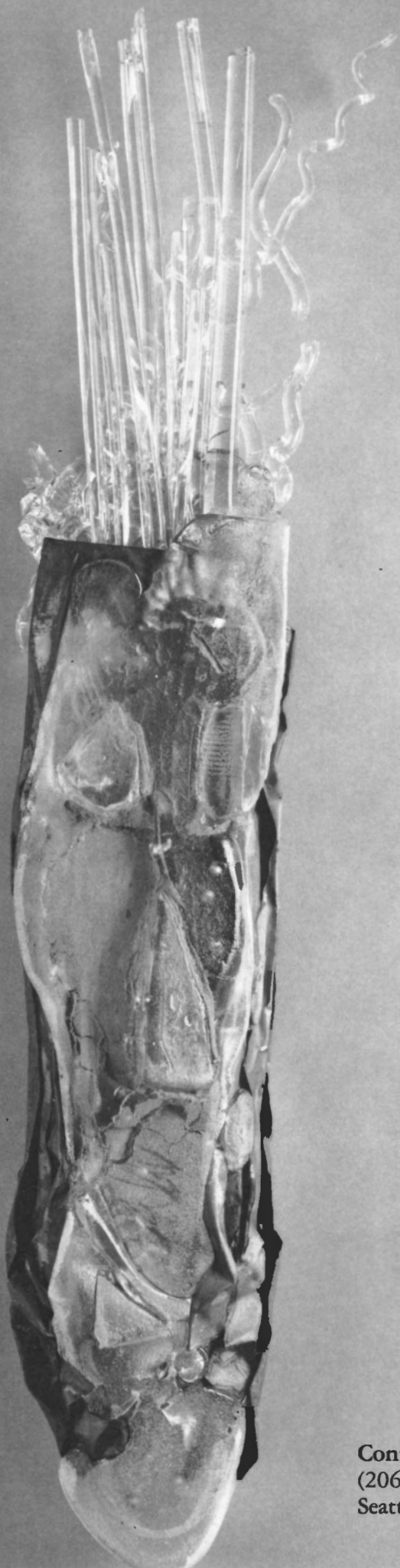
ART IN GENERAL

79 Walker Street, NYC. 10013 *(212) 219 - 0473*

ANN GARDNER

Heads and Faces in Clay and Glass 1981–1985

Bellevue Art Museum
January 25–
March 9, 1986



Blue Eyes (1985), 40″ x 8″ x 3″,
sand-cast glass,
copper, enamel paint.

Contact Irene Mahler
(206) 624 7363
Seattle, Washington

CURTIS & SUZAN BENZLE

PORCELAIN / COLOR & LIGHT

We work with clay because we believe that this genre embodies a humanism resulting from millenia of artistic sensitivity to cultural necessity and is capable of refocusing society's attention on the link between our aesthetic aspirations and human needs. Far from being pure intellectual invention, clay objects have the capacity to reach back in time and cultural experience to tap the vital link between societies and the objects that satisfy the desire for beauty and the fulfillment of daily needs. The historically relevant forms we employ provide us with a means of incorporating issues of traditional human significance into aesthetic statements relevant to contemporary art.

Martha Schneider Gallery
2055 Greenbay Road
Highland Park, IL 60035

Barranquia (1985), 6″ x 8″ x 3″, porcelain

GARTH CLARK GALLERY

MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY CERAMIC ART

■

Forthcoming Exhibitions	New York	Los Angeles
February	Hans Coper James Lawton	Phillip Maberry Jeff Oestreich
March	Anne Kraus Kenneth Ferguson	Lidya Buzio Susan Shutt
April	Peter Voulkos	Voulkos & Company
May	Jan Holcomb Gertrude & Otto Natzler	Gertrude & Otto Natzler

■

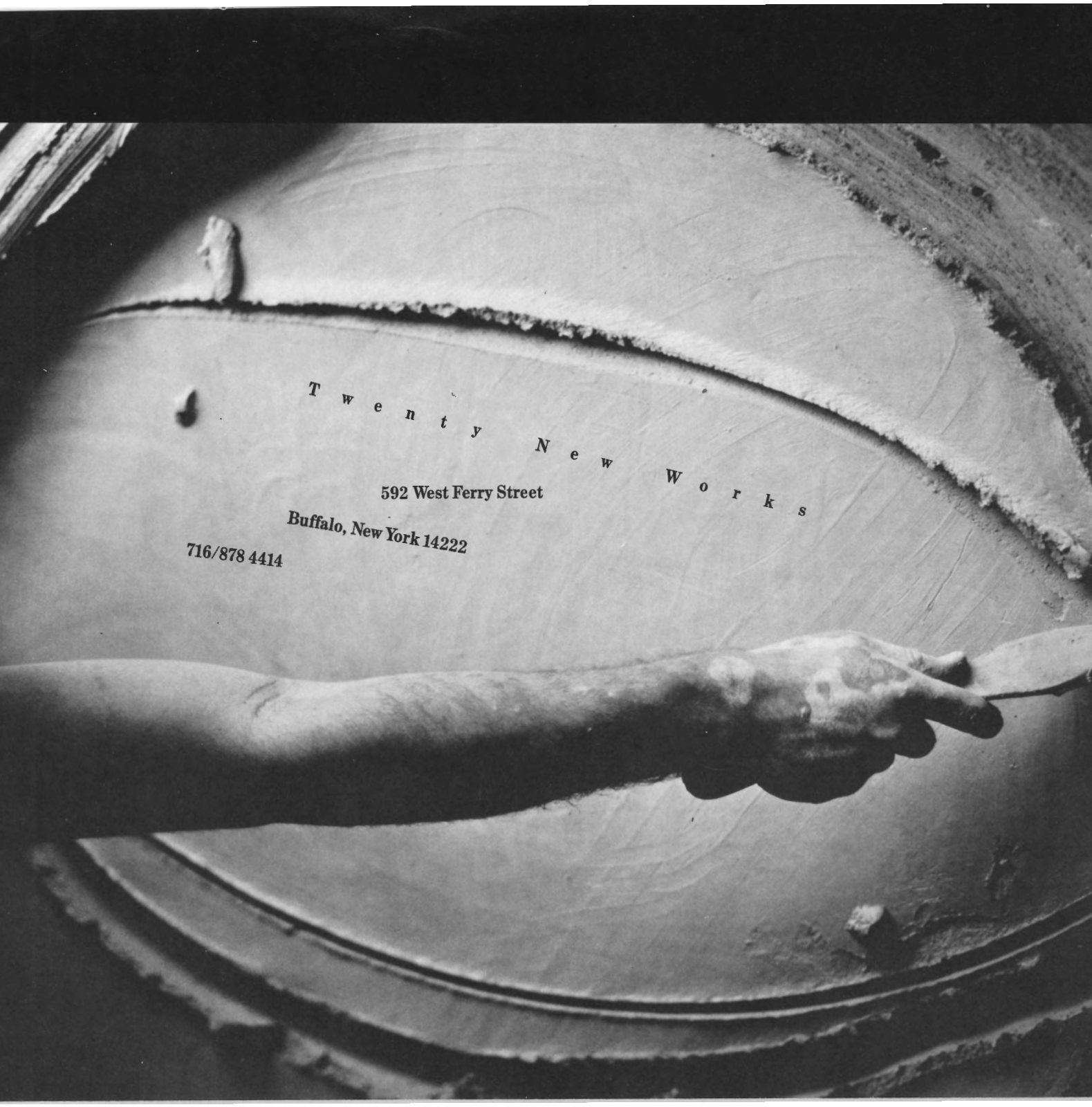
American
Rudy Autio
Ralph Bacerra
Lidya Buzio
Philip Cornelius
William Daley
Michael Duvall
Ken Ferguson
Frank Fleming
Chris Gustin
Jan Holcomb
Robert Kibler
Anne Kraus
James Lawton
Roberta Marks
Beverly Mayeri
Art Nelson
Richard Notkin
Jerry Rothman
Judith Salomon
Adrian Saxe
Susan Shutt
Anna Silver
Chris Staley
Akio Takamori
Beatrice Wood
Betty Woodman

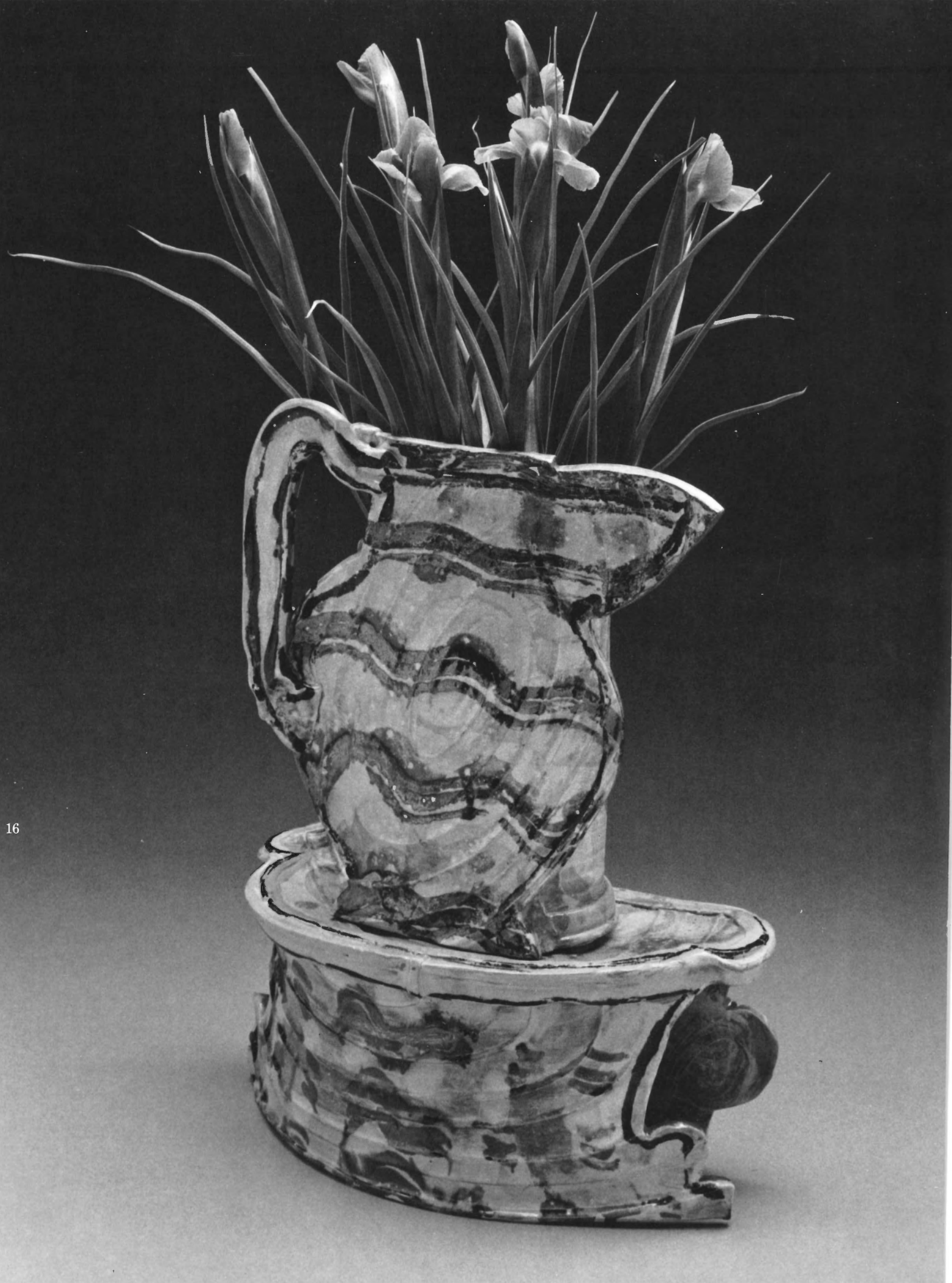
European
Tony Bennett
Enzo Borgini
Carmen Collell
Henry Pim
Alev Siesbye
Martin Smith

Modern Masters
Michael Cardew
Hans Coper
Maija Grotell
Bernard Leach
Glen Lukens
Keith Murray
Henry Varnum Poor
Lucie Rie
Peter Voulkos

■

New York: 24 West 57th Street, NY 10019 (212) 246-2205
Los Angeles: 170 S. La Brea Avenue, CA 90036 (213) 939-2189
Kansas City: By Appointment Only—Telephone (816) 753-5299
London: By Appointment Only—Telephone (01) 359-4111


Twenty New Works
592 West Ferry Street
Buffalo, New York 14222
716/878 4414



Breaking the Mold
Criticism and Ceramics

John Perreault

Ceramics should be art criticism that has ceramics as its subject. Unfortunately, most writing about clay has fallen short of this simple goal, assuming instead a technical, biographical, or inspirational tone. Furthermore, too much writing on ceramics has been of the how-to-do-it variety, some of it quite blatantly so. Fortunately, ceramics criticism has begun to turn away from the technical mode. As an outsider—by outsider I mean someone who does not throw, pinch, or model clay—it is hard to know how much emphasis to place on technique. Given the history of writing on clay, it is probably better to err on the side of omission. After all, only a minimal amount of information is really necessary.

When I am writing about paintings, I like to let the reader know what the medium is, what the size is, and, if it is really visible and part of the aesthetic experience, how the painting was made. Is the painting acrylic or oils? Is it bigger or smaller than I am? Was the paint applied with a brush, a palette knife, or dropped from an airplane? Do these things make any difference? More important to me is conveying to the reader how the painting "feels." There are qualities an artwork has that a photograph can never record. Those are often the most important aspects.

I am curious about how things are made. I like to know the mental and physical steps that went into them. In art, these are often there to see; you look and look and how things are done is not that difficult to figure out in a general way. One of the glories of clay as an art medium is that we have an almost immediate identification with it. It is such a pliable material; and it seems to have a memory. Indeed, some scientists are beginning to think that clay, not some methane soup, was the beginning of life. Clay is a living substance; it stores and gives off energy.

What I want to say though is that I don't intend to treat ceramics any differently than I treat painting or welding. Glaze formulas are of no more interest to me than the chemical structure of oil pigments. What is important is what the artist does with those glazes. I don't care how hot the kiln was. I am only interested in what shows. Does the piece do anything to me? What is its psychological weight?

Ceramics criticism must also outgrow the biographical mode. Biographies *are* often interesting—they can create a mystique or destroy one—but biography is not art criticism. Where and when an artist was born, and even to whom; who he studied with; where she lives now—these little facts help place an artist and the art in temporal, geographical, and cultural contexts. But in themselves they do not constitute criticism. I personally don't think artists' lives are more interesting than anyone else's. And I don't think what artists say about the world or the trees or their art is necessarily relevant. The artist never has the last word. The artist can be verbally inept, a liar, a maniac, and totally off base.

Ceramics criticism should also move away from the inspirational mode. Some inspirational writing will probably persist, as it seems to be so much a part of clay culture. Poetry also comes with the package. True poetry, however, is down to earth; we can do without the cheaper sentimentalities. It's good to be reminded that ceramics has a personal healing power—as all art must have—but ceramics as cult, calling, or religion hasn't saved the world yet.

But perhaps reform is not the best approach. Would it be better to start fresh? Is it possible? And if so, why would anyone want to do this? Because a new start means new mistakes; we are tired of the same old mistakes. The process is what is important, the argument, the language. It is not so much a matter of a new way of looking at ceramics or feeling ceramics, but a new way of writing that will get us closer to the experience. My own bias—and practice—leads me to suppose that this new ceramics criticism would be more personal. In other words, the writer must include himself or herself and his or her direct experience as a factor, but in an objective way. Writing about other art forms might profit from this also.

Since there are so many kinds of objects made of clay and so many different traditions coexisting under the ceramics rubric, the first thing we might do is separate the vessel form from ceramic sculpture. The clay vessel is, in some sense of the term, sculpture. I know that. But

Impruneta Pitcher *(1984), by Betty Woodman, 21" x 16" x 8", earthenware. Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York.*

there is a slightly different tradition going on. How can we identify that tradition? Is it that the vessel includes a certain set of forms?...is hollow?...is utilitarian, or at least ritually utilitarian, whereas normal sculpture is not?

Ceramics includes a number of forms and formats, but the vessel form, no matter how irregular or funky, gives me a pleasure quite different from that offered by other kinds of art. Pots are basic. There are rules and limits, yet within these constraints—or because of them—there is spirit and elegance. Other kinds of artworks made of clay are fine, but they do not seem to have this unusual conjunction of qualities. The vessel affords a particularly intense experience having to do with the hand/eye relationship.

Because we are so used to vessels in everyday life, we have a general feel for them. Their shapes, too, are like various parts of the body or like the body itself. When I look at a vessel, I feel it with my hands. I know its texture and its weight. If I can actually touch it and pick it up, both senses are working at once. But what really happens is that the relationship between the visual sense and the tactile sense switches polarities. Looking at a vessel form, I imagine its tactility, its texture, its weight. When I am holding a vessel, I cannot really see it completely, so I have to imagine what it looks like. I like this interplay.

When I look at a vessel, I see that it is of a certain size, which I perceive in relationship to my hands, my body, and my own strength. If I could pick it up or if I had to move it—if I were to use it—how much energy and strength would I need? How careful will I have to be? Is it so delicate that I will have to be particularly careful and slow? Each vessel implies an expenditure of movement and energy and a degree of attentiveness. Related to this is the perceptible amount of energy or attentiveness that went into making it. Weight, texture, body. Am I so far off base? Vessels are paintings in the round. That's one way of looking at them. They are paintings, sometimes monochromatic, sometimes even depicting shapes and scenes, but paintings you can hold in your hands. Outsized vessels you want to embrace. But ceramics vessels are also monochromatic or polychrome sculptures. It's all very complicated.

This is the fact I start with: I perceive and experience a ceramic object in a different way than I do a painting or a sculpture. This difference has something to do with my hands. My hands or their psychic image are involved, too, when I look at a drawing or a painting, more so when I look at a sculpture, but most of all when I am trying to absorb a pot.

Am I getting any closer? I am sure that this psychological, ultra-tactility has to do with the experience of handling other vessel forms; that experience links up with visual experience, providing a tactile context or matrix. And it is kinaesthetic, too. There is danger. If I lifted the pot, might I drop it? Would it break? I don't usually ask myself these questions when I am looking at a painting.

Until more of this basic work gets done, this exploration of very difficult and subtle distinctions, ceramics discourse will remain at the village level. With all of our workshops and conferences, ceramics has presented a united front to the world, but that unity has had a price. The ceramics discourse is largely oral and cut off from the larger art system and from history. In the meantime, here are some questions ceramics criticism must address:

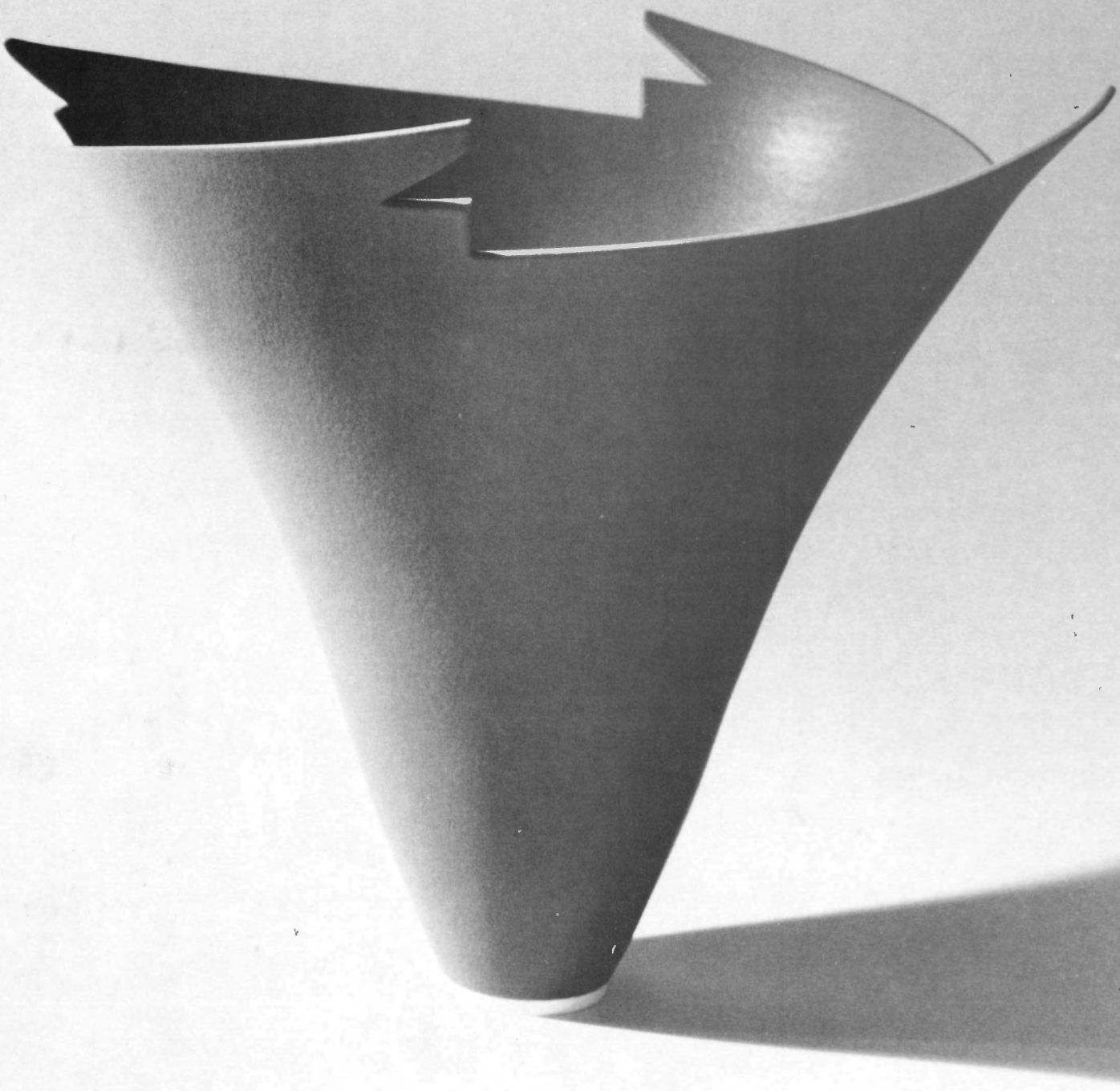
What place does innovation have in ceramics?

Are we to use the same critical tools used in painting and sculpture when writing about clay? (Yes. We can learn from the fit or the lack thereof, the tension, the disruption of language.)

Should ceramics enter the same art marketplace as painting and sculpture—where the advantages and risks are obvious—or should the alternative marketplace be developed and extended? Would a full-fledged entrance into the art marketplace risk the demolition of the popular, nonelitist support now available to ceramics?

On the other hand, what relationship should ceramics have to production and industrial design? What is the relationship between beauty and use?

Y.K.B. Lightning Flight *(1985) by Elsa Rady, 9¼" x 11". Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, New York.*



Afterthoughts

There are problems that we have not been able to solve here at Sun Valley: media problems, market problems, power problems—critical problems. I think it has helped to air them and perhaps have them clarified. I myself have a lot to digest and I don't yet know how I am going to put to use what I have learned by talking to and listening to, not only my art critic colleagues, but everyone in this room.

Several things are clear to me. I listened with great interest to the presentations by Jeff Perrone and Jeff Kelley and was encouraged by the seriousness of their thinking about ceramics. We may be entering a new era in ceramics criticism. I don't see this excitement and creativity happening in criticism devoted to painting. Contemporary ceramics is inspiring to critics. Perhaps it is because so much work needs to be done and the field is wide open. Good critics take risks.

Also as a result of this conference, I now understand there is a serious self-image problem in the clay world. More than one artist has expressed it. I think it is time to get rid of the underdog state of mind. This state of mind, let's face it, is comforting. But is it humility or is it cowardice? Are clay artists full-fledged artists? I think they are. From the global/historical point of view, ceramics is not a minor art; it is the primary art. Painting and sculpture are merely offshoots.

A clay artist must be ambitious as any artist who specializes in a particular material. Clay artists must begin to realize that they are not only competing with their contemporaries in clay, but with other living artists and with the great artists of the past in whatever medium: paint, stone, fiber, metal, clay.

Finally, do not leave criticism to the critics. Artists should be critical of their own work and the work of others. Perhaps they should write criticism themselves. But I also mean something else. As a critic, I often get my best ideas from artists, either from interpreting what they say or attacking what they say. I see very little position-taking in the ceramics world. I don't see any manifestos. Where are the new statements?

Every artwork must be an act of art criticism. The stronger that act of art criticism is, the stronger the work of art. I look for the artwork that says: you were all wrong. This and nothing else is what art must be; this and nothing else is really art. What we call art criticism is really metacriticism.

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Untitled *(1985) by Arnold Zimmerman, 62" high, stoneware. Photo: S. Baker Vail. Courtesy Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia.*

Liver, or Kidney from a Can?

Edward Lebow

"What do you like?" is the critic's after-meal question. They ask me, but my family's cat could answer quicker. Hercules—that was his name, and bold too—may not have known what was good, but habit said raw liver was heaven, canned kidney unpalatable. He'd hunt his meals before he'd swallow a piece of kidney from a can. And so would I, if that question lay behind the last cup of coffee of every free meal.

"What do you like?" really means, "Are you a good witch or a wicked witch?" Do your tastes recommend your thoughts for serious consideration or for getting squashed by Dorothy's house? I know what I like, but not without first knowing what I think. Give me time. Taste is usually confused and wrong before turning into the opinion, "I like...." Understanding is the doorman of judgment, so I smile to him as I pass. I am looking for what I like. And when I find it, I usually find my experience, not simply my verdict, of the art. I see the artist's intentions again, not the grapevine, press release, and interview versions of his plans, but the ones made evident by the work itself. Art is composed of works, details, facts, not talk or wishes. I wish more critics would get that right. If they want to review literature, let them write about books.

I know what I like, but not without first knowing what I think. Give me time. Taste is usually confused and wrong before turning into the opinion, "I like...."

In the visual arts, the facts of invention can be seen. Size, shape, color, and form, texture, mass, volume, or discernible subject matter are abstractions on paper, but their material coherence in the work becomes my visual memory of the object. In looking for what I like, my emotional memory helps. It more accurately judges the success of a work and whether its achievement is something worthy. (How worthy comes later.) It enables me to weigh previous works by the same artist and similar works by other artists with those at hand. It tells me my reaction. This comparison frequently illumines the criteria I need to understand the current works. It tells me whether an earlier pattern of development has been continued or halted, whether a dry hole has become a well, or whether a well has gone dry. It tells me whether the criteria used to understand older and similar works are pertinent to consideration of the most recent. Changes or differences in an artist's work usually generate new criteria. Critics succeed by grasping the consequences of these changes; we err by falling out of step or empathy with them, or by missing them altogether.

Success and error do not define a good or bad critic, nor does taste which agrees with one's own. Critics must be able to sift and weigh the facts of the work in question. Readers, in turn, must discern whether critics ink their paper with rhetoric or with analysis; whether they shade their opinions with broad categorical strokes or with finely detailed lines. Does the critic understand the art and convey that comprehension through a point of view which elucidates the work? Does he, in T.S. Eliot's words, put "the reader in possession of facts he would otherwise have missed?"

Many critics simply can't distinguish between useful and irrelevant facts. They would rather be confused than wrong, having never learned that error is informative, confusion only confusing. They adopt the attitude of scrutiny they find in other art criticism, without taking its method to heart—the method of finding, weighing, and responding to visual facts. Moreover, they confuse an objective eye with a willing one, misunderstanding that a willing eye is not undiscriminating. A willing eye considers an image beyond the point of confusion, until distinctions become apparent, then meaningful.

Throughout the history of criticism, this willingness to pursue images has led good critics to points of view which their successors invariably have labelled "prescriptive." We hear that Roger Fry and Clive Bell were leashed to "significant form," and Clement Greenberg to a "formalism: which saw significant form emerging from the self-definition of artistic means." Rarely do we hear that a critic's intelligence, tastes, and empathy are as naturally limited by temperament as an artist's, and that such a limitation in a critic's work may be a source of strength, not weakness. In the finest writing, this limitation reveals that a critic has considered and comprehended *something*, not everything. This something marks his originality, his acuity. And if we take the time to read what he has written, rather than what others have said he has written, we will find the meaningful facts of art that previous critics failed to grasp and successive ones are indebted to him for making plain.

Philip Rawson is devoted to the facts, not the circumstances, of ceramics, but he is not a critic. Among critics, Jeff Perrone bathes in facts when he remembers to turn off the faucet. However, I frequently hear that the writing in *American Ceramics* is pretentious, that its dry dust can be found in the woodwork of virtually every house, on every street, in every town of the nation. Its writers—and I am one—seem almost proud of their ignorance and their complete lack of perspective on the history of art, of objects, and of ceramics. They even lack perspective on their own small roles in a fishbowl field. I can't disagree. As a group, we do not understand that artists, not we, formulate the criteria by which work is judged.

Understanding is the doorman of judgment, so I smile to him as I pass. I am looking for what I like. And when I find it, I usually find my experience, not simply my verdict, of the art.

Good critics know that those formulations are found in the art. Like all good artists, they understand that work is not made according to some arbitrary or personal opinion of what is beautiful or what looks good, but according to what fits—what properly answers—the image or vision preoccupying the artist's mind.
As a group, we have never learned the lesson Coleridge remembered:

that poetry, even that of the loftiest and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, has a logic of its own, as severe as that of science....In truly great poets...there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word...[1]

The choices are made by artists, not critics. Through their selection, modification, refinement, erasure, and reinstatement of elements in an image, they exert a kind of criticism—a process of self-definition—that moves the image toward the inner logic valued by Coleridge and his teacher. This criticism whispers to the artist that portions of the image are not yet right or rightly placed, that work must continue. And it nags as long as the image falls short.
Critics, of course, stand outside, looking in. We are usually not privy to the course of these changes, nor to what the artist has in mind. The artist, however, rarely makes what he envisions. Whenever he says he has, he complains that the result differs from what he had imagined. He'll spend his life trying to get it right, and fail.
Mr. Cézanne was especially troubled by his incompetence. His studies of nature progressed so slowly that a month before he died, he was "in such a state of mental disturbance, I fear at moments that my frail reason may give way....Will I ever attain the end for which I have striven so much and so long?"[2] His incompetence was matched by Roger Fry's, who spent many years and eighty-seven pages considering some of the painter's better failures, before admitting that his analysis "halts before the ultimate concrete reality of the work of art, and perhaps in proportion to the greatness of the work it must leave untouched a greater part of its objective."[3] Neither Fry's nor Cézanne's inability to account for what they saw and felt prevents millions from going to the walls each year to look for themselves. Some go because they like to rub against treasure, some for relaxation, some because their older sisters drag them by the arm. Still others go because they are, like Fry was, continually surprised by what they find when they attempt to penetrate Cézanne's conflicts and point of view. In coming to understand his, they come to understand and contemplate their own. This, I've found, is the appeal of conscientious criticism and viewing. It requires you to engage another's point of view. Its form of self-portrayal yields the workings, not simply the effects, of personal likes and dislikes—an experience apparently never considered by my family's cat or many contemporary writers on ceramics.

Readers must discern whether critics ink their paper with rhetoric or with analysis; whether they shade their opinions with broad categorical strokes or with finely detailed lines.

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1906), pp. 3–4.
2. Letter to Emile Bernard, *Cézanne Letters*, John Rewald (ed.) (New York: Hacker Art Books, Inc., 1976), p. 329.
3. Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1970), p. 88.

Funds from the National Endowment for the Arts supported this article. Thanks also go to Michael Lamar and the graduate students of ceramics at the Rhode Island School of Design. Edward Lebow is preparing a book on Ken Price.

1. Shards of Oribe pottery, *from* Oribe: Famous Ceramics of Japan *by Takeshi Murayama (Kodansha International).*

More Sherds
Breaking the Silence

Jeff Perrone

The following text is dedicated to those who asked, "Yes, but what are you going to do with this *sherd?*"

A text consisting of recombined fragments from a written essay ("Some Sherds on Ceramics") and a spoken presentation ("Sweeping Up the Shards").

There is nothing then, about this text that can be said to begin here and now. Nothing more than breaks within blanks.

Some time ago, I was talking to a young ceramist about another potter's work. In describing my experience of the work, I said I had no trouble separating at all times the form from the surface, that these two elements remained always distinguishable and differentiated. The ceramist resisted, insisted that good ceramics, such as the ones under discussion, never allowed that sort of unallayed discrimination. Successful vessels, he argued, never permitted a viewer to disengage any of their consistent parts from one another. These parts formed coherent and absolute unities, primarily, the very important one of indissoluble integrity of form and surface.
We disagreed about this for some time. I saw pieces of constructed pottery; I saw parts and elements and articulations and differences. He saw undivided unity.
Obviously, how could one deny his experience, even if he chose to overlook the material character of the work itself? What surprised was his out-of-hand rejection of an analysis of ceramic structure as the assembly of parts, as relations between material differences. Somehow, such an analysis violated certain traditional ceramic standards—judgmental standards employed to determine why some ceramics are good and others bad. Unity was his basis of value. For him, all good ceramics were united by the synthesis of all their aspects.
To doubt ceramic unity and integrity was cause for some alarm.

Later, I was talking to the woman who made the contested vessels, relating the controversy, wondering what she might have to add. She had no trouble with my analysis. She thought she had quite deliberately differentiated not only form from surface, but volume from shape or profile. One way she did this was by using forms from one period and style of ceramics, and surface-glazed decoration from another, entirely different period and style. In her estimation, the experience of the work, if successful, was to be found in an oscillation back and forth between comprehending the form and comprehending the surface, in a kind of tricky, hide-and-seek, now-you-see-form-now-you-see-surface play of illusion. I had no problem with that, but she added a retainer I thought unnecessary. She proposed the following: what comes first in the experience of her work, and of all ceramics, is the apprehension of form. The surface is experienced always after the form. The form has priority over and above and before the surface—rather like Adam in the Garden of Eden. First, the form; then, the surface; and only then is a viewer allowed the back-and-forth motion between form and surface.
Now, ceramists have a pretty good reason for thinking in this order of form first, surface after. When they make their work, form comes first. It has a procedural priority in the itinerary of production. Even if a ceramist begins with a clear picture of the object to be made, form and surface, the form precedes the surface.
Given this order, one aspect before any other, the ceramist knows where, when, and how to begin.

It might be, then, the very issue of *beginning*—in what place, at what time—that concerns us.
Or: how to begin, not as a ceramist does, but as writers, critics, as *viewers*. Can we assume, for example, that viewers experience ceramic objects in the same way that ceramists do? Do viewers necessarily repeat, in experience, the ceramist's order of making? Does form, for instance, have temporal priority over surface for a viewer? And are viewers limited to the order of the object's manufacture—from beginning to end?
There may be some reason to doubt this.

The form/surface issue is only one example in ceramic thought and practice of a traditional, embedded hierarchy. There are many others. When we can distinguish between any two elements of a ceramic object—and we do so distinguish all the time—the

2. Bowl, *Style III, Mimbres Classic, black-on-white, 6½" diameter x 2⅜" deep. Collection Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge. Photo: Hillel Burger, © A.F.A.*

3. Bowl, *Late Style II, transitional to Mimbres Classic, black-on-white, 12" diameter x 5½" deep. Collection Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge. Photo: Hillel Burger, © A.F.A.*

inclination is to assume that one element is above, before, and prior to the other. And the feature after or below, such as surface, has, so to speak, a second-class status.
Given form and surface as different aspects in ceramics, can we say that form always comes first in a viewer's experience? There may be some reason to doubt this. It is not possible to apprehend form in ceramics in anything resembling an entirety or completeness; at any one point, at any moment, some part of the object is hidden from view, like the dark side of the moon. So form *as a whole* cannot have priority over surface. But is it the case that even a part of the form is experienced before the surface? Is not surface exactly *what's on top*—that is, materially, what's over and before the form—rather than the other way around? It is shape or profile that allow a viewer to recognize form, and they are functions of the surface, of the exterior, outer edge or plane of the form. Because the surface is the *last* thing to be made or added, it's the *first* thing to be seen.
For a viewer, a description of the ceramic situation may not be marked by repetition, but reversal. Seen from a certain point of view, ceramic analysis may have to move in a direction opposed to that of the maker, on the principles of reversal (of predetermined order) and incompleteness (the delay of any and all unity).
A while back, I saw an object in a museum that compelled me to consider how ceramic analysis must be marked by reversal and disunity. The work was very small, no more than three inches in its largest dimension. I believe it was an early Edo period *mukozuke*, with a squarish form and an intensely coral-colored clay body covered with a white slip. The exterior was unmarked by any decoration but for that slip—but I cannot be sure of this, and it is necessary to emphasize this uncertainty. The object was displayed in a certain manner that can be characterized as premature ejaculation: the lid was not on top of the container—it was displayed upside down—its inside surface was turned outside, so that a viewer could see the interior, which included, in a bluish gray wash, a decoration of Mt. Fuji seen through the mist.
Now, if this object had not been separated into its two parts, that surface could not be seen. If the cover had not been dislocated, disoriented, reversed, resting on its "back" or "top," that surface could not be seen. As a viewer, I relied on the *breaking* of the form and a *reversal* of orientation to see the interior decoration. That is one thing. Another is that what was withheld in this display was the action, the experience, of opening the *mukozuke's* lid and discovering the unexpected landscape. What this involves is the issue of *touching*, for another difference between what a ceramist experiences and what a viewer experiences certainly has to do with touching, with handling.
Ceramists may touch their objects all they like; indeed, they must. But, for a viewer, there is no such necessary repetition of the tactile, hands-on experience. A viewer looks but does not touch. This is a particularly troubling issue in ceramics, since so often an object was meant to be held, used, touched. (We cannot say that of a painting, for instance.) There is a residue of the desire to touch in the ceramic experience that has directly to do with use and function—but this desire is almost always delayed. Many people have argued that this limits understanding, that ceramics can only be properly appreciated if held in the hands. Connoisseurs frequently insist on such a requirement.
But one is not required to act in the manner of an appreciative connoisseur. One may take a hands-off approach to ceramics, and not without reason. The approach may seem improper, unconcerned with any appreciation—and may have nothing to do with uses relating to proper function.
Tea masters turned tea bowls upside down to examine the bases. But not while they were drinking.

As a writer, is it possible, or even desirable, to limit oneself to those works one has held in the hands?
If one could only write about ceramics one had touched, there would, literally, be no text—there would be silence, blankness. Indeed, without the pictures accompanying this text, there would be no text. The experience of ceramics is marked irretrievably by the visual context: in museums, in galleries, on pedestals, behind glass, and in photographs.
There will be a difference, then, between ceramics as that which is *touched* and ceramics as that which is *seen*.
It may be a question of cutting off the hand that feeds us: surely, in the context of traditional ceramic thought, a questioning of the relation between the ceramic object and the human body. And the perfection of an undivided ceramic/human form.

How can this traditional thinking be characterized? The most prominent was promulgated by Leach: to wit, ceramics is "the neverending search for perfection of form." This is his definition of ceramics. If we take issue with it, it will not be a quibbling over a minor detail. The "search for perfection of form" occurs repeatedly in many disguises in ceramic discourse, especially in tandem with an idealization of the human form. Leach's "perfection" plays a structural role in ceramic thought, one having no basis in physical objects, but seeking its sanction in a model of the human body, as a metaphor, as the paragon of perfection. "Man derives his happiness in life through the normal functioning of his body and is likely to associate the pleasant experiences of existence and of procreation with what he calls the beautiful or appealing," according to a basic ceramics text. For Leach, the "vitality" of a pot is located in the projection, flowing from the human form, "flowing perfectly through the *hands* of the potter" (emphasis added). This perfection is a perfection of the idealized human form as opposed to "the hideous wreckage of crippled distortion"—perhaps, the imperfections of fractured feet, severed ears, chipped lips, broken handles. The ceramic object that has not attained "perfection" and normal (bodily) functioning thus must be ill-formed, ill, sick, lame, crippled, imperfect, and as distasteful as the midgets and mental defectives in Diane Arbus photographs.
We leave aside, for the moment, the fact that such ceramic/bodily perfection must never occur as such—otherwise, there would be no need for the search to be neverending.
Neverending—and, thus, never beginning.

Leach associates the perfect with the normal. In his famous first chapter of *A Potter's Book*, he uses "standard" and "normal" interchangeably. The normal, healthy pot coexists with healthy bodies, and with a smooth, healthily functioning society; if our bodies and society are to be healthy, so must our ceramics.
The problem was that perfection had not been achieved at the time Leach wrote, and his historical context, what he called "a period of break-up," with its shattering of standards, its psychological violence, physical damage, its fragmentation of society, demanded the urgent, moral tone of Leach's perfect, normal ceramic/bodily/social discourse.

We will return to this breaking-up, and an acknowledgment of the fragment. Whether or not one chooses to begin with it, one must eventually return to it.

For Leach, what is "normal" in ceramics is the perfect unity of design and execution; the "cooperation" of hand and undivided personality; the integrity of designer and craftsman creating "well-balanced, proportionate forms." That would be Leach's perfectly sane, normal, procreative, intact pot: the virtues of a projected human mental and physical health. "It is true," he admits, "that pots exist that are useful and not beautiful (i.e., imperfect) and others that are beautiful and impractical; but neither of these extremes can be considered normal. The normal is a balanced combination of the two." What is *extreme*—what is abnormal, unbalanced, neither perfect nor useful—cannot be healthy. Leach proposes as one extreme some (unnamed) Japanese ceramists who "made pots with deliberate imperfections and overstatements of technical characteristics." They were engaged in "nothing more than a kind of intellectual snobbery."

At the risk of intellectual snobbery, perhaps there could be an extreme, overstated, imperfect, unbalanced discourse for such Japanese pots. It would certainly be one of a quite uncomfortable projection and loss in the proximity of the hands:

Furuta Oribe sent the flower vase to his friend Ueda Soko with a note to the effect that giving it up was like parting with his fingernails.

Not that the distortions, misshapes, and imperfections of certain Japanese wares have not been forced to succumb to the perfectionist requirement: in a very immediate, *bodily* way, they conform to the dictates of human projection, fitting "perfectly" into the hands that hold them. The deformations are only seeming,

illusory, and ceramics, again, returns to touch.
If the ceramic body projected any violation of the hand, of normal bodily functioning; if it made one question one's own supposed integrated physical form; if it made one unsure of the metaphorical relation between ceramic and human body; then, after Rawson, the result would be a "sensuous castration" (i.e., the opposite of "the pleasant experiences of procreation"), a sexual metaphor as the model of ceramic dysfunction.
One would have to be sick to speak of it.

Imperfection: we are not raising an issue unknown in ceramic thought.
Leach recognizes that some of the best pots have irregularities, especially on their surfaces. He posits a problem: in what way are "perfect" (i.e., Sung) pots with accidental kiln effects different from those which are "spoiled" by the very same effects? The accidental and the imperfect are "the chief difficulties" in arriving at a sound, healthy, sane basis for ceramic practice. The difficulty in distinguishing the perfect imperfection from the imperfect imperfection is crucial, and must be accomplished.

How can this be done? The variabilities, many unforeseen, produce both "right" and "wrong", "good" and "bad" sorts of imperfection. Somehow, the perfect must be strong enough to withstand and absorb accidental imperfections, and repress, subdue, and subordinate them. Perfect, or "seeming" accidents, according to Leach, must be "incidental" to perfection—peripheral, casual; they are *happy* accidents, as "incidental" implies the fortuitous, the lucky. What are accidents in bad pots are incidentals in good ones. And how can one tell the difference? Certainly, Leach will not allow ceramics to be defined in terms of chance, accident, luck.
So he goes further, somewhere out-of-reach of the ceramic body itself—to the "potter's intentions." These intentions may also be variable, like accidental kiln effects, "depending on the nature and manner of the use of materials." Not only must forms not be deliberately imperfect or deformed—that is *eccentric*—but the potter's intentions cannot be eccentric, either, for "eccentricity detracts from the beauty of the pot."
Imperfect, eccentric minds yield imperfect, eccentric bodies.

We will return, as did Leach, to this eccentricity—a detraction from beauty/perfection of ceramic thought/body that, by definition, decentralizes the concerns of anti-eccentric discourse.

Very carefully, piece by piece, we endeavor to begin, neverendingly.

Rawson, in *Ceramics*, explains what it is about ceramics that "swoops" him away, in the kinetic sense. For him, the complexity of relations in ceramic contour, "suggests actions quite unutterable in words"; for him, the ceramic activity itself "is totally indescribable"; for him, a vessel's "virtues" are "imponderable." Needless to say, if these most basic ceramic considerations—those of form, shape, and process—not to mention surface, which is, of course, not mentioned—if they are truly beyond words and cannot be described, why bother to write about them? Why write about what is said to be beyond—or perhaps, before—writing itself—that is, before words, in silence? Is Rawson's call for silence a consequence of the inadequacies of language, or has it to do with something more essential? Does it have anything whatsoever to do with *ceramics?*
If the ceramic experiences of movement and shape cannot find form in words; if we must remain silent before them; if all we can do, according to Rawson, is learn to "appreciate them"; then, of what use are words? Why not simply keep monkishly mute?

Why bring this up at all?
There is a relation between the devaluation of the imperfect or fragmented human/ceramic body and this suspicion of language. Only silence (the unutterable, the indescribable, the imponderable) is a "perfect" response to the perfect human/ceramic body; only silence is an unbroken, complete, unified, undifferentiated whole. Words, after all, interrupt, break up, the perfection of silence; they separate, articulate it.

The perfectionist requirement derives from anti-intellectualism (the opposition to "eccentricity" and "intellectual snobbery") and a distrust of analysis—one not restricted, by any means, to ceramic thought. Analysis is the opposite of keeping quiet; it picks things apart, segments them, breaks them into pieces. It remains to be seen if *ceramics* allows for any synthesis, for any perfection, any unity.
For now, one cannot assume any such predetermined orderliness obtaining perfection.

Introduced into ceramic discourse, a certain form of slow, patient analysis would represent a dismembering of the ceramic body and the risk of unhealthiness and partiality: an occupational hazard. And this partiality is also what can be called *taking a position*, one that is always consciously imperfect, because one cannot *assume* that any perfection, any synthesis encompasses differences within a unity of point of view.
To repeat: that point of view, in form, on the surface, is always partial.
If one were to take exception, to question the issues raised by dominant ceramic discourse, it would necessarily occur as a remarking along the lines of a discontinuity, a breakage or fissure within the human/ceramic body, within silence, that would not assume models of perfection of form or the unity of intention and product.

How has the dominant ceramic position been stated?
Clark has summarized it in this way: "It is between the seeming contradictions of simplicity and complexity that the mysterious essence of all ceramic art is centered."

We choose this quotation for the sweeping unity of the phrase "all ceramic art." This is *the* essence of *all* ceramics. As the encompassing whole, this "all" integrates and synthesizes all differences: its effect is to render ceramics *all of a piece*, one might say, no shards.
But this mysteriousness: is it a quality of the contradiction itself, or of the "seeming"-ness of the contradiction? That is, is the contradiction "simplicity/complexity" real or illusory? If only an illusion, then wouldn't that make the "essence" equally "seeming" and illusory? Is this what makes the essence so mysterious? Can an illusion be an essence? The very essence of all ceramic art?

Is Clark's "center," which is the location of the essence, a place where the (real or imagined) contradiction resides peacefully, or are its terms in violent conflict? Or: is the center as "seeming" as the essence and apparent contradiction? If the contradiction is really illusory, then how is it that we can distinguish between its component parts?

There is, indeed, something mysterious about this central essence, something unimaginably mysterious; and it seems so mysterious not because of any illusion about the reality of contradiction—and certainly not because of any supposed truth value inherent in this definition of the ceramic essence—but because of the illusion of some unified "center" that is not easily attained, not easily named.

For, in dominant ceramic thought, the neverending search often begins with that word—*center.*

The center plays a pivotal role in ceramic thought and practice as the basis of throwing. It is, as well, the spiritual position and the designation given in the influential book *Centering*, where it touches upon both ceramic process and moral stance, as a method of meditative, balanced orientation in an "eccentric" society.
But what about this center?

In its very first paragraph, *Centering* names the center as "wholeness" and "unity" (which should immediately bring to mind the standard of ceramic/bodily perfection), and, then, immediately describes this center as "mysterious." The claim is made that "the center holds for us all"; later, that the author, like everyone else, is "instinctively motivated toward symbols of wholeness."
Centering's center, which is mysterious, has one effect worth mentioning: it keeps the ceramist from "falling in love with a mistake," which, oddly enough, is to *resist* instinct. The ceramic center thus does not permit any integration of error and intention; it avoids the amorous temptations of accidents; it rebuffs the eccentricities of one's desires—which would disrupt the unity, the wholeness of the center.
Clearly, there is a danger, a possibility, of falling in love that would lure a ceramist away from the center. The center may find

4. Bowl, *Style III, Mimbres Classic, black-on-white, 11⅝" diameter x 4½" deep. Collection Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York. Photo: Justin Kerr, © A.F.A.*

7. Bowl, *Style III, Mimbres Classic, black-on-white, 9½" diameter x 4⅜" deep. Collection Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona at Tucson. Photo: Justin Kerr, © A.F.A.*

itself breaking apart, from within, with pieces flying off in all directions—not a healthy situation.

Suppose that during throwing it was the center *itself* that was thrown out. Suppose we retain the "concept" of throwing for this purpose, as a replacement for, a displacement of, the center, if only to keep the terms within the ceramic discipline.

To throw.

To throw (out)—from the center—would be to discard, to shard or break up, to disturb and disrupt the illusion of the mysterious center; to disposition the ceramic body and remark it along the boundaries of a fault. This disorientation of the center—producing an eccentricity—would be somewhat like throwing away the crutches of "seeming"-ness, and allowing the pieces to fall where they may—and perhaps, against our better judgment, falling in love with the result.

There may be some anxiety in this throwing, for some may continue to project (in the sense of "throw" and in the sense of "identification") human form onto the hurled ceramic body. Such a throwing would exert an irregular pressure on ceramic thought—amounting to a *perfection under fire*—producing an imperfect, detached, incomplete ceramic text.

This thrown ceramic body, lodged within the text, may result in no more than a display shelf full of shards—or, perhaps, an incision made to operate.

The oldest Japanese vessel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has a large rip in it, an "imperfection," probably formed during its firing. This torn "face" has its "back" turned away from the viewer. It "faces" the back of the display case, so that the crack can only be seen through the large mouth of the jar. It has, thus, been given a "front"—continuous, unified—and a "back"—discontinuous, ill-formed—although such orientations literally *do not exist.* Clearly, the installation intends to shield the viewer from deformity, defect, imperfection: the tear has been hidden from sight, repressed and silenced by museum discourse.

Let's leave aside the hurting beauty of this jar, and attempt to examine its impossibly imperfect form and function.
It could never have been used; it would not hold a liquid or any other, even solid, substance. Most likely it was excavated from an old kiln site full of "useless," broken, imperfect pots that had been thrown away.
Does it achieve perfection of form or function? If not, why salvage it from the mountain of ruins?

In a certain manner, from this point on, we will be proposing a *negative archaeology of the sherd.*

Figure 1 in Leach's *A Potter's Book*—his model of perfection—has a chipped rim, a crack, and irregular spatula markings.

It may achieve perfection of form; it is also a shard.

The first illustration accompanying this text, is a collection of shards, a photograph on the back of a dust jacket for a book on Oribe ware. Nothing about the shards demands we speak of perfection. Should we write them off, pretend they do not belong to the body of ceramics proper?
It would be convenient to remain silent about them.
But the silence is already broken.

In the context of ceramics, these Oribe shards are shown on the *back* cover of the book, a not purely accidental appearance, as shards, so to speak, appear as the *reverse* side of ceramics, the other side of ceramics proper.
What is on the cover? A so-called complete bottle, no doubt an object more desirable, more attractive to the book's potential buyer.
But, on the other, reverse side, those ceramic orphans. Like the break on the "back" of the Japanese vessel, they can be concealed, hidden, but not completely. Not from some other point of view.

Does this other point of view already exist?
In 1962, Slivka responded to what she called a "New Ceramic Presence." (It might interest the reader to compare the first third of her essay, with its rhetoric of "freedom" in ceramics as a reflection of the personal liberties sanctioned by the liberal, democratic State, to Leach's dismissal of liberal democracy, Communism, and Fascism as structures upon which to build a "healthy national life.") The work Slivka had to explain surely represented a different kind of ceramic practice, one seemingly at odds with the then-established standard. It was work that rejected "classical" (i.e., perfect) form "in the interest of surface." It fell in love, so to speak, with "Japanese" asymmetry, imperfection, and incompleteness. Its reigning procedures involved experiment, risk, and the incorporation of "mistakes."

As descriptive of the ceramic objects and processes themselves, Slivka's text displays an accuracy all the more admirable for being so contrary to established taste at the time.
But somewhere between description and analysis, one recognizes a break, a discontinuity, that, rather than diverging from established ceramic thought, leads us back, yet again, to the neverending beginning.

It is not accidental that Slivka writes that the ceramic process is "mysterious." That process, defined traditionally in terms of technique and craftsmanship, is marginal enough in the new ceramics to be redefined as "spontaneity"—"the intimate knowledge of tools and their use on materials." Something about the new ceramic presence demands this redefinition, bringing spontaneity—in effect, impulses and accidents—under the ceramist's conscious control, manipulable like tools and materials. Slivka recognizes that a certain kind of technical perfection has been disregarded by the new ceramists, but she asserts that the "accidents" flaunted by them are "conscious" ones, fully a part of the ceramist's "intentions."
Although not incidental to perfection, they are nonetheless *intended* imperfections and irregularities, as they were for Leach.

The force of these intentions is undeniable. Whatever (this) intention is.

Reëvaluating the "deliberate eccentricity," it is the deliberateness rather than the eccentricity that is new about the new ceramic presence. Implicit is a new standard, a new set of values, but no new terms.

If a piece of *pottery*, the *created*, had, in the past, been offered as the model of perfection; if, in this conception, the distinction creator/created was synthesized by *repressing* the creator, reducing him to "the humble potter"; then, in the new ceramics, the dualism creator/created is "synthesized" by repressing the *created* by favoring the creator, who, elevated above the newly humbled pot, becomes an "artist," no longer humble, but willfully, violently present. The force of the creator's intentions displaces the object itself, rendering it subservient to the aggressive action of the creator's presence. The focus, for instance, is on *his* spontaneity, not the spontaneities of the ceramic process itself.

So what is "new" about this presence, what is present, is not anything having to do with ceramic objects, but *man.* In Slivka's phrase, "man as the center of things," not the perfection of form, a ceramic object, as the model, as the center. But we cannot fail to notice that the rhetoric and metaphor of the center still holds. In whatever case. The center structures the new ceramic presence; the center remains intact. This center remains regardless of what inhabits it, creator or created.
No matter what term of any dualism is repressed in synthesis.

Repression—a strong, violent word.

Is there not great violence perpetuated against the ceramic body in Slivka's new ceramic presence? And, then, is it not due to the violence of the center, at the center, with man taking over the position from ceramics as such? "Man as the center of things"? Yet: whatever the case, the center acts as that model explaining, situating, locating, placing the origin, the beginning of the ceramic work.

At the center of the "new ceramic presence," one finds, according to Slivka, "a deeper feeling of presence," one that is "the search for a new ceramic presence"—an echo of the "search for perfection of form" no doubt accidentally intended. Whether the search be for perfection of form or the means of man's self-expression, it is

still to be searched for—and found—at the center.
The "presence" of all ceramics, in ceramic thought, is the center, deep or superficial.
We may almost be ready to begin. Thus far, we have done little more than read.
In *writing* about ceramics, however, there may be no texts to speak of. Just bits and pieces, in no particular, predetermined order.
Just *sherds*, without centers.

To propose a text of analysis and interpretation of the *sherd*, tentatively beginning—to break up the unity of the (illusory) center, the presences of ceramic thought. The difficulty with (not the *mystery* of) this *sherd* may arise from the sense that, without a center, there will be no security, nothing to hold, no essence, no reassuring, familiar bodily projections, no order, no standard. No feelings of presence, deep and complete.

And perhaps: no *meaning*.
"However many sources a work may evoke, it exists to make them real and unify them, by its own presence...its meaning and its presence cannot be separated." (Rawson)

The Oxford Dictionary of Old English does not distinguish between shard and *sherd*; they have the same meaning. From a certain point of view, that of ceramic analysis and interpretation, this is fine, because in the absence of any other terms, all shards are *sherds*. But further: the *sherd* is, in part, the analysis and interpretation of the shard. It functions as a structuring and destructuring element, one that is interchangeable, a substitute.
Sherds: pieces of broken pottery ground and introduced into the ceramic body instead of grog or silica as a means of reducing shrinkage.
The *sherd* replaces, stands-in-for, acts as a replacement that can be added—it does not *represent*, re-present. It may or may not be used (as a substitute for grog or silica, for example). It is the superfluous, extra, excessive, eccentric element in ceramics—the additional piece.

The *sherd* has no center, but broken, irregular edges. Neither a concept nor a thing, never exclusively one or the other, the *sherd* is that structural ceramic term that allows a viewer to differentiate parts, elements, attributes, and functions of a ceramic object. Shards, as a subset within the class of *sherds*, are themselves these separate, broken parts of the ceramic body. *Sherd*, then, carries over the negative, devalued connotations of the shard as expressed in ceramic thought and practice. The devaluation of the *sherd* in relation to perfection, unity, centeredness, presence.

In relation to the metaphorical human body of ceramics, *sherd* strays from the projected ceramic terms borrowed from anatomy: mouth, ear, foot, lip, and so forth. *Sherds* are severed body parts, incomplete and imperfect, falling short of fullness and integrity. The *sherd's* fragmented physiology hurts the viewer who projects human form onto it. In this identification, the fear, anxiety, and discomfort arrive from the possibility that the human body may become shattered like the *sherd*, and this fear affects the psychic life where it is most vulnerable: at the body, as a disruption, a deflection of an integrated self-image.
Ceramic shards certainly carry a negative value for this reason, in this traditional metaphorical projection, and have been assigned subsidiary status in the body of ceramics, being understood as debased, partially absent versions of what are considered complete, whole, unified objects. Shards, because they generate the fear of loss, or imminent damage to bodily integrity, function in ceramic thought as avoided elements, blind spots, silences. The problem becomes one of how to see a blind spot, how to break the silence.

To propose to interpret the *sherd* as a method of seeing ceramic absence: rather than sweeping them under the rug, leaving them where they will fall.
The *sherd* is organized *by absence*, by that which is missing from it, by disappearance rather than presence—although the *sherd* is also material residue left over after loss and breakage. Fear of the *sherd*—which is not the same as what John Perreault called "fear of clay," although it explains that fear—is produced not by the *sherd* itself as much as by what is missing from it, the part lost, the absence always in danger of never returning to presence. The *sherd*, although materially present, visible, is nevertheless marked by loss, absence, void. Ceramic thought and practice has done much to protect itself from the *sherd*. It has repressed this material in models and standards based on the ideals of centering, unity, perfection, integrity, and synthesis. Not a word is spoken. One might go as far as to say that ceramic thought has structured itself around an evasion of the *sherd*, evading the *sherd's* absences.
Thus, the *sherd* predicts itself, its own absence, as it is repeated, doubled as an absence in ceramic thought.
Indeed, it predicts the resistance against it, neverendingly.

To write that *sherds* are repressed, avoided, and feared is to say something very specific; for the place where repressed, avoided, and feared material goes in our mental life is into the unconscious. To propose, then, the *sherd* functioning quite precisely as the unconscious material of ceramics, is, *by analogy*, to suggest an analysis and interpretation of the *sherd* as a psychoanalysis of ceramics. The *sherd*, like the improper desire or fantasy, is repressed, because it is psychologically disruptive; because it comes in bits and pieces, displaced and condensed; because it delays bodily integrity, the desired unity of ceramics as an identifiable, fully present, conscious act of the body. The *sherd*, like dream material, is buried, hidden, sneaky, appears in strange places, and has odd effects. Like the unconscious, it has a certain structure and works according to certain operations. And it often rules over conscious, intentional actions.

From a certain point of view, one can say that *sherds* often break into awareness through subterranean excavation—a form of ceramic psychoanalysis called archaeology. (As material, the ceramic *sherd* "begins" as excavation, removal, and fragmentation of the earth—clay is dug up, leaving a hollow, a hole, an absence; its residue is in being *not there*—the clay body is a *sherd* of the earth's body.) The *sherd*, like a repressed desire, is lost to consciousness, to ceramic presence, and is then dug up, retrieved during this excavation, this earthly analysis. The material returns, after being buried, like a bad thought or desire. The analysis discovers nothing more than disjunction and fragmentation.

For historians and archaeologists, shards that have been buried with the kilns that begat them have value in terms of determining at which site similar so-called complete works were produced. The shard thus has a historical and archaeological interpretation in reference to those objects that have been dispersed or displaced away from the kiln site.
So, rather than the so-called complete object explaining something about the shard, the shard locates the so-called complete work's origin. The shard can have this kind of descriptive, locating power over the body of ceramics *because* it is broken, useless, imperfect, and partial, and remained where it was.

But, in ceramic thought, it is always the so-called complete work that has explanatory, locating priority over the shard. In analysis, however, in the archaeologically reverse situation, it is the shard that comes "first."
On the other hand, the shard has no necessary priority over the dispersed object. One cannot assume, given the *sherd*, that there are any priorities of the first place, in the first place, at a locatable origin, in a certain, determinant order. The *sherd* does not allow one to entertain any such assumptions, any such illusions of a centralized, secure beginning.

In no particular order, let's analyze the *sherd*.

Sherds are odd because they do not correspond to any ideas concerning purpose or intention. Shards may be produced when a potter edits work; when, let's say, he or she deliberately breaks an object, for whatever reason, by, for example, throwing it on the floor.
But shards can also come into being by choice. At a crowded opening, a drink is accidentally spilled, someone moves away to avoid being soaked, elbows a pedestal, and a pot falls to the floor and breaks.
Through accident or intention, the object still falls to the floor and shatters; in either case, it becomes a collection of shards.

If, because of whatever peculiarities during firing, a pot cracks or breaks, *even before it could have ever become* a so-called complete work, it also becomes a shard—and this has nothing to do with either intention or accident.

So what is odd, eccentric about shards is that one cannot determine how they came to be shards, nor does it matter. The shards in Illustration 1: a consequence of intention, accident, or what? The interpretation and structure of the *sherd* cannot be referred back to the authority of any maker (what a ceramist intended to do), cannot be explained by pure chance (what the unlucky bystander could not help), cannot be blamed on process (holding a kiln responsible).
The *sherd*, then, is that ceramic fragment that is without responsibility either to intention or accident—it is irresponsible and unreasonable.
Just as, so to speak, is its analysis and interpretation.

Consider the tray on the left in Illustration 1, the one in the middle with the crayfish decoration. Somehow it got edited out of the body of proper ceramics. (I would like to think that this was not because of any deficiency in the decoration, because that stylized crayfish is, I think, an exquisite bit of painting. But that is something else.) The dish is situated the way it would have been had it ever been used. The two *mukozukes* to its right, however, are a different matter. They are on their "sides," if one can call them sides. They are not in any potentially useful positions.
So, another characteristic of the *sherd* is that it doesn't have any necessary, proper orientation—certainly not one relating to function.

The *sherd* thus differs from the so-called complete ceramic work in terms of a stability oriented to use, a stability usually given according to a positioning at a base, a gravitational center that gives balance and keeps an object from falling.

The *sherd* always falls.

Another characteristic of the *sherd* is that, if we do not automatically assume it to be a debased version of a so-called complete object, it has some explanatory power in terms of how we experience those so-called complete works.

Why "so-called"? Because it is the *sherd* that problematizes the notion of completeness itself—by what is meant by part and whole.

Let's again try to reverse the situation, and analyze what is going on with the so-called complete work through the agency of the *sherd*, rather than the other way around.

Is the shard, or the *sherd*, complete in itself? Yes and no.
Imagine a hypothetically perfect, complete, unified vessel. According to Leach, this would be, say, a Sung vase. Even if this vase had not one crack, chip, or break, it would still have a hole in its top—an opening, an articulation, *exactly an absence* in the form that would allow it to function *as* a vase. This imaginary, perfect vase would thus have a limit to its completeness that has directly to do with its usefulness. Without a disrupted continuity, over and between the limit of inside and out, it could not be a vase.

Whether or not it be a whole, it must have a hole.
Whether or not it is a shard, it is still organized by the *sherd*.

This is not *simply* a game, a playing with letters.
The ceramic form itself is a *sherd* that breaks and limits: along a boundary, between outside and inside, the *sherd* holds not by centrifugal force, but by the support *and* break *between* a double surface. The exterior of a ceramic form is a *sherd* in relation to the form's interior, and vice versa.
The *sherd* is both double-sided continuity *and* the articulated break between inside and outside. Working at the edge, the limit (to completeness), and the boundary (of presence), in a peripheral manner, the *sherd*-without-center has the character of a *core*. This core, noun and verb, is an inside volume as well as its removal, as in a coring/excavation. It leaves an absence, produces a hollow. It is not simply fully present or absent.

(Perhaps it appears as the zoological sherd: a shell, as of an egg or snail, a fragile and structurally eccentric mineral covering, oval or spiralled.)

5. Bowl, *Style I, Mimbres Boldface, black-on-white, 3⅛" x 7⅞". Private collection. Photo: Justin Kerr, © A.F.A.*

6. Bowl, *Style III, Mimbres Classic, black-on-white, 9¼" diameter x 4" deep. Collection Taylor Museum of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Colorado Springs. Photo: Justin Kerr, © A.F.A.*

8. Teapot *(1982), by Adrian Saxe, 9" tall, porcelain. Collection George and Dorothy Saxe, San Francisco. Courtesy Garth Clark Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Nancy Hirsch.*

The *sherd* is that ceramic articulation that enables a viewer to analyze the material limits, boundaries, and constructive elements in ceramic objects. And what is considered complete, and what fragmentary, is undecidable.
The *sherd* is that undecidable ceramic term, the term of the broken, complete part—one that allows an interpretation of the material limit of what is absent, unseen, lost, void, and missing. And it has the capacity to do this because it does not repress or rule out the possibility of absence, breakage, or accident.

For a vase, in this case, functions because of the *sherd*. Yet the *sherd* also renders the functional dysfunctional. One may not predict when which case will hold. It is a matter of neverending differentiation.

The *sherd* is the principle of ceramic difference; it withholds completeness and maintains differences, making no attempt to unify or integrate them. Following the shard, the *sherd* never performs as a model or ideal—that synthesis of aspects. It remains eccentric, and cannot be absorbed or accommodated into dominant ceramic thought, which insists on the normality of a healthy integration.
Yet the *sherd* is not completely without ceramics—it is also within—although not entirely. It slips in and out, over and between the ceramic boundary—for instance, between the categories of ceramics as functional object and ceramics as art.

One reason the shard and the *sherd* cannot become normative, cannot be valued, and will always be resisted, is because, in the real world—a phrase used with irony—the so-called complete work has a very serious priority: *economic* priority. People who buy ceramics don't buy shards—people who sell ceramics do not, cannot, sell shards. The editor of a ceramics newsletter titled it *Shards*, but was forced to change the title because it just made collectors too uncomfortable. In the marketplace—if that be an index of the real world—so-called complete works command more money. The more "perfect," the higher the price.

Apocrypha: a photographer was taking a picture of a Mimbres bowl. Rather than hanging it up on a wall and shooting from a tripod, he hovered over it, aiming downward. To make the story short: he dropped the heavy camera on the bowl, and it shattered into a hundred pieces.
One might call this an *allegory of the sherd*.
But the sharding of the bowl is not the interesting thing, for the story is always told *because* this particular bowl was extremely valuable, i.e., complete, which means it had not been punched through its bottom.

Now, is a "complete" Mimbres bowl more valuable for any aesthetic reason? Not likely. It is more valuable for its rarity, a rarity with economic meaning, but no other. The price, or the completeness, does not affect the interpretative power of Mimbres bowls.
Would such "completeness" add anything to an analysis? No, but the *desire* for completeness has some relation to fear of the *sherd*, and repression.

The Mimbres bowl in Illustration 2 has been "restored," which means someone has gone through the trouble to hide or gloss over the fact that it is a shard. This would be a most physical, material example of repression of the *sherd*. It is an attempt to fill in over a loss, an emptiness, an absence in ceramic consciousness, a thinly disguised desire for completeness and wholeness where none exists—a kind of ceramic prosthesis.
Illustration 3 has been restored on its rim, but not at the bottom. Given the various ways in which ceramics can be restored, the notion of a complete object certainly becomes very complex. Mimbres bowls, in any event, need not have punched bottoms in order to be interpreted in terms of the *sherd*. Let us consider the white circle at the bottom of the interior surface in Illustration 3. It is not a flat circle, but more like a disk, like a contact lens, since the bowl is curved. That shape is usually considered to be anchored by a centerpoint, without regard to the obviously eccentric hole.
Let's approach this point—by the eccentric path of the absence at the breakage—and try to analyze whether or not Mimbres bowls will sustain an interpretation based on the necessity of a unified, coherent center; that is, without assuming that such a center indeed exists, will the center ever be reached?
Even if we could pretend to begin, somewhere, the question is, do we reach any destination?

To begin anywhere—with process, for instance.
Mimbres bowls are made by coiling. Coils are spirals, ever-turning extensions of material out to a limit. They never return, always fall away from themselves. Spirals are not circles returning again and again to some starting position; they never return, designating an irretrievable loss of the center, moving away and out, deviating from central, gravitational pull. The spiral/coil, loss of gravitational force, symbol of decay and irreversible, disintegrating structures, suspends, with perverse confidence, the location of a totalizing center, a fixed reference.
As a procedure, the coiling/spiralling, like the *sherd*, graphically marks ceramic loss of stability.

Given that procedural interpretation, and looking at the multiple spirals in the decoration, is there an analyzable relation? The decorating spirals—which are like constellations of multiple so-called centers—are of a very particular type, recurring over and over in Mimbres painting. They are not restricted to *the* center—wherever that may be. They are doubled and reversed spirals that do not touch at the implied origin; contrary, interconnected-but-not-touching, they ever follow separate paths. And rather than having marked centers, there are blanks—or perhaps it is more precise to say that the so-called centers are marked by conspicuous absences.
But out from a blank—two spirals, breaking out from that blank, in reverse, contrarily. This indicates that rather than the center being some kind of stabilizing point, a unified position or location, it must be a place marked by *loss of unity, loss of determinate location*, since its effect consists of doubled, reversed spirals. That is: this decentralized location is an *already broken blank*, for it allows the spirals without/within itself.

Even if this blank cannot be seen, it must already be divided within itself; it has an already divided identity—partial and disunited. Otherwise—what else would account for the spirals? To account for the spirals' structure, the concept of a "center" in Mimbres cannot refer to an orienting point of unity and wholeness—but, instead, as a double loss of unity and centricity. It may be difficult to imagine what a broken absence is, but this seems, in effect, to be what Mimbres blanks insist we imagine. The blank space must be already, internally articulated, double, constructed in at least two parts—that is, partial, like a *sherd*.

In order—for the spirals to take place in any place—the Mimbres "center" must be constructed, digressing and breaking away from itself, within itself.

To digress.
The ceramic *sherd* is a term of interference in the centralized ceramic system, an interpolation within, disrupting the idealized center that anchors ceramics and any unified, organizing order based on that center or centering. The *sherd* is this internally subversive element, displacing and delaying the synthesis of the center, crumbling any secure edges—whether they be the boundaries of ceramic identity or a self-definition of ceramics as a centrist organization. The *sherd*ing of the center is thus not only a disorientation, but a disorganization of ceramics in reference to the desire for an assured self-identity. It delays ceramics from acquiring total self-knowledge—something will always be missing, blank.
The *sherd* has this paradoxical effect and function: it is a disorganization that gives ceramics a structure—a structure irregular and eccentric, deviating and wandering away from the supposed center. One has a difficult time, perhaps, following the jagged, broken, divisive edges of this structuring principle, because they do not cohere, and include blanks and discontinuities.

If Mimbres spirals have divided centers—putting the concept of "center" into question—then it is not possible to conceive of them as even continuous or regular disorientations away from those broken centers. If one were to argue that the spirals were continuous in their deviation, that would amount to no more than retrieving the loss of the origin, the center, as a totalizing feature,

as a controlling order.
Mimbres does not allow that. Illustration 4 makes explicit that the paths out from the articulated blanks are discontinuous, discrete breaks abruptly changing direction by part. What are called "lightning bolt" or "stepped" motifs in Mimbres also structure themselves in this way: the notched, discontinuous turns backtrack *as* they get ahead of themselves.
And this bowl does not have double spirals, but, oddly enough, triple ones—and we will return to this third aspect of the *sherd*ed center in relation to structure.
Keeping in mind, neverendingly, that, so far, everything has been on the surface.

Illustration 5, unusual in its single spiral, might appear as an exception: not doubled, not reversed. Yet it sets itself off on no straight path. It coils over the surface of the bowl, and it coils around itself: what one might call "waved" in the field, always deviating from a central direction at all points along the path, off and on, an alternating current, a rhythmic vibration of the spiral, in oscillation always avoiding the point, the straightforward, undelayed destination. This single spiral is wrapped around an implied series of discontinuous points from which it deviates—an imaginary, illusory, continuous line that, if drawn, would intersect the wave at points between blanks, with *leaps* from one to the next.

The leap, the jump *between* points: that would be the *sherd's* blank, the between-as-absence. Without any eventual continuity, but "a disorientation from which one never moves away."

Or: for that matter, with an insistent indeterminability, if there is indeed but one spiral. To see the absence, the blank between, which is *not* painted: is the "negative," "white" spiral not every bit as much a spiral, without being marked as such?
And so on, for every so-called "double" spiral, is there not a spiralled band of white between the two black spirals?
And, oddly, no matter how many spirals, is there not always an extra one between, a spiral of betweenness/absence, a leaped space in between all "marked" spirals?

The problem with systems based on an ideal center, where the center holds, where pieces do not fall (apart), where objects maintain a completeness and integrity, is that they cannot account for the possibility of accident, absences, discontinuities, and divisibilities—all of which are, in fact, necessary and inevitable in the ceramic system itself. This accounting for loss and absence is what the *sherd* has the audacity to do. Its function does not require that it be revealed, or that it be present and identifiable—it may remain blank, empty, absent, a jump between two presences.
The *sherd*, then, is the trauma of interpretation of what is *absent* in ceramics.
And, then, it is impossible to *present* it in anything resembling completeness. So one cannot present it as an authoritative system, because, in itself, it withholds completeness and totality—is nothing more than a piece of the puzzle.
And, like the puzzling piece, it has an irregular, discontinuous, asymmetric, and eccentric structure.

Puzzling, perhaps, but not mysterious or silent.

In *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Poe begins by quoting a French proverb, one that implies that detective work proceeds by "denying what is, explaining what is not." What is not (present), what cannot be seen or described, can, nevertheless, be explained—that is, *interpreted*. The interpretation of *what is not* in ceramics, what is blank, absent, and missing, takes the form of a reading of the *sherd*. Such a reading/interpretation does not seek to recreate or reconstitute the ceramic object, rendering it whole by locating all meaning as presence—as the presence of the unified center. If the "center" has been the "what is" of ceramics, the *sherd*, the "what might not," the "what may not" of ceramics, dislocates the center, from itself. The "what is" has a cleft and cleavage. It must be both itself and other than itself, with a split and opening.
The "center" has no point—yet there is an opening, hole, and absence that suggests the impossibility of closure in the ceramic system. It is this very opening (out from, away from) and discontinuity in ceramics that allows one to interpret—not on the basis of an undivided center, but according to the *sherd's* principles of ceramic incompleteness and indeterminacy. One cannot determine whether Mimbres doubled, reversed spirals are wholes or halves. We cannot determine if the blanks are first or last places—origins or endings.
Because the blank between spirals is a *sherd* and split—and not only at the "origin," but at every location between their paths—the effect is one of a scroll unfolding; or, on the other hand, of a folded screen, with articulated sections in a hinged or chained circuit—but *without* the connections between them.
Illustration 3: spirals intertwined but never touching—DNA spirals, neverendingly recombining.
Like an aperture, expanding and contracting, ceaselessly.

To return to the white, "blank" at the bottom of the bowl.
It is not a unified, stabilizing center, but already marked by splitting. And there is something else about this divided center with an opening, its relation to the reversed, doubled spirals, and their relation to the *sherd*, and this involves the very doubleness and reversibility of the bowl itself.
It has been traditional to consider only the interior surface of Mimbres bowls, because they are decorated. But, as within that decoration there are blanks and absences that are *not simply nothing*, attention might be paid to all other supposed blank locations and surfaces as well, and not overlook them because they "appear" to be left unmarked.

One of these locations, these surfaces, is the exterior, curved plane, which always remains undecorated—which is not to say *unmarked*. Nothing is left unmarked. Even an absence. And this exterior has no immunity from interpretation and analysis; it is the reversed, double, other side of Mimbres. The "dark side," the blank.
We may be ready to break silence on the break at the bottom.

If we describe the shape or profile of a Mimbres bowl, it consists of two, double, reversed curves, like a hyperbola. At the base of the hyperbola is the so-called center of the bowl. The upper, material limit is the break that marks inside from outside. That upper limit is defined by two points furthest removed from each other and from the "center." This "center" or base or bottom might, then, appear as that place of centering or stability where the two contrary curves meet and become one at an origin—the center.
It is thus of the utmost interest that this apparent, approximate location is where Mimbreños punched holes in their bowls: at a location that might be construed as the place of greatest contact between the double, contrary curves. The punching through, one might say, puts a stop to the regularity and coherence of an ideal center, and does so exactly by breakage and loss.
The presence—of anything—is not full, not deep, not complete. It is broken, a *sherd*. The absence is not complete—it *sherds*, as fragmentation. The *sherd* serves to differentiate between an imaginary center and its material limitation; between, as well, any exclusive definition of a completely independent inside or outside. For the puncture, the punctuation marking, is also double and contrary, as it breaks through between two surfaces, two sides, one concave, one convex. If this *sherd*ing "kills" the bowl, is it not doing so by marking the limit of any completeness, any full, continuous presence?
That is, exactly, by the discontinuity and absence of *death*?

Or, for that matter, at the division and separation of *birth*?

It has not escaped our attention at any time—Mimbres potters were women. We would propose that the complexity of articulations; the nonrepetition of design; the con-fusion of inside and out; the extraordinary degree of sensitivity to active absence; and the organization around splits, blanks, and openings that deny the hegemony of any full (phallic) presence—that these, and others, are nothing less than a delocalization of pleasure as the Otherness principle of the sherd, as the feminization of ceramics as such.

The foremost interpreter of Mimbres, J.J. Brody, in describing the spatial complex of these bowls, would like to imagine one, ideal center accurately grounding all design elements.

Supposing the center—one will always find it.
Brody invents a theoretical frame around this center—in essence, the central illusion of ceramic thought—a frame-up—which he compares to one-point perspective. But when he must locate this center, his theory falls apart—falls to pieces, one might say, in accordance with the eccentric, material *sherd*.

Brody writes, "Orientation is usually to the center of the bowl, the center itself, or an imaginary point near or below it."
Not only must he approximate by qualifying this location as *usual*—leaving open the very real possibility for deviation, but not accounting for it—but he also has to force/repress those deviations from the center into the realm of the "imaginary."

What, in any and all events, keeps what he calls "the center itself" from being equally imaginary?

Mimbres shows quite accurately and insistently that the idealized center "itself" as a secure, balanced, stable, determinable location is what is illusory—and that, materially, it is asymmetric difference along with division within an insecure, approximate, irregular, disorienting center that is always marked and articulated—and never imaginary or illusory. (Illustration 6.)

The punching, which renders the bowl a shard, is the *sherd's* approximate marking, the materialized fragmentation of any idealizing concept in ceramics, any unifying ceramic identity or continuous presence.

Very often, the doubled and reversed Mimbres shapes (such as spirals, such as positive and negative configurations) are said to be anchored, or originate, at the still point of a secure center—or, at least, by a determinate axis through that center. That is: the dualistic oppositions are *synthesized*, made whole and complete, with no gap between them, by a fusion-without-difference.
But the *sherd*, although it permits ceramic oppositions, is not completely part of either side of any opposition: it is the dynamic insecurity and asymmetry of the split opening, the breaking of any first place—permitting opposition while delaying synthesis. It comes between (/) the synthesis of form/surface, exterior/interior, part/whole, positive/negative, touch/sight, etcetera—dualisms that are effects of the *sherd's* persistent differentiation of aspects.

The ceramic *sherd*, as the extra, residual, unreappropriable, odd, third term, intervenes within and between oppositions—it *both* breaks *and* binds them. Not only is the idealized ceramic center not complete and whole—some kind of oneness and undifferentiated unity/synthesis without repression of difference—but it is also *not a duality*—a relation of complementarity. The *sherd*, as the breaking/binding virgule, the division *between* doubles, takes place between any two terms of any ceramic opposition. As the between, it cannot be synthesized; on the contrary, it is *analytic*—escaping alternatives and eluding the either/or situation.

Again, Mimbres visualizes this analytic, asynthetic division that does not belong strictly to either term of an opposition, that has no predetermined, orderly place.
Between the two doubled, reversed, opposed, "white" shapes in Illustration 7, is a break—the *sherd's* inbetween—*as if* the space had been cut across a serrated limit and pried apart. This curved band is not a line, but a rupture with width—the inbetween of the duality, one that cannot be bridged, and yet binds the oppositions as it allows them to dehisce. It is *as if* the *sherd* tears the bowl asunder, not at the center, but across and between this zigzagged fault. One cannot say that this gap belongs to one side or the other—the break is a leap, between.

Let's make a leap.

If the *sherd* is like a puzzle with a piece missing, it is also the so-called complete puzzle, because a finished puzzle is marked by the irregular breaks between its parts. The *sherd* is not only and simply material breakage, loss, or absence, but—to repeat—assembly and differentiation of elements.

Illustration 8 shows a teapot by Adrian Saxe.
Without being a shard, it is yet organized around the *sherd's* principle of assembly and differentiation, on a working premise of construction according to extreme, perverse, distinct parts—ones that do not *oppose* one another, but that are analytic and asynthetic. The parts accumulate but do not synthesize. Pieces are stuck together, as in collage—which, in French slang, implies something improper and illegal, a liaison outside the law.
Breaking ceramic rules, the form *dissembles* in this teapot: dissembles as differentiation and dissembles as false resemblance.

The *sherd* materializes as this doubling/dissembling.

The teapot juxtaposes three sources (Chinese, English, French) corresponding to three functions (base, container, handle): three sources and functions maintaining their differences, their separate disguises, and not in dualistic opposition.
The handle, as one of these components, is in asymmetrical relation to the other two by virtue of its inorganic, planar, metallic, and perforated character. But it is also eccentric in reference to an implied function: it *feigns* that function. "Handle" is the way one *names* it, the way one *sees* it—not how it is handled or touched. It implies or refers to utility while remaining ungraspable.

Not fitting the dictates of the human hand, the handle resists human projection, delays response or correspondence to the desire to touch.

Between the opposition sight/touch, one discerns the *sherd* in operation, analyzing and differentiating between the terms, never succumbing to them. It comes between the traditional synthesis and order of "form follows function," which is nothing more than another priority.
Given the handle, function has no priority over form, and form does not follow from functional considerations. The *sherd* disrupts and disputes the identification of form with function, in any order, in any equation. It *postpones* their order and equality as a self-enclosed system.

The *sherd:* the ceramic delaying tactic keeping a viewer, a writer from reaching completion, arriving at a destination—ever affirming the interminable process of ceramic interpretation.

A neverending search—for the ways in which ceramics, away from itself, interprets itself, otherwise.

Jeff Perrone is an art writer living in New York City. *Copyright 1985 Jeff Perrone.* *Photographs of Mimbres bowls are from the exhibition, "Mimbres Pottery: Ancient Art of the American Southwest," organized by the American Federation of Arts and supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and The Mabel Pew Myrin Trust.* *Copyright A.F.A.*

Criticism and Clay
Past Models, Future Shapes

New Rituals for Ceramics

Louise Klemperer: You say potters should create other rituals in our society. How can they do this?

Jeff Kelley: I think most of our lives are lived unconsciously and I think ceramics have the capacity, both in terms of process and function, to help enliven. I don't just mean entertain. I mean draw out from us a certain self-consciousness of the ritual which we are performing. When I drink coffee from a cup, which I do every morning of my life, I don't really think very much about it.

I would like to see made explicit, what is now implicit in the ceramic enterprise, the process of its creation. Many artists do that—John Roloff, for example. I would also like to see the functions, which I think have disappeared from the ceramic enterprise, the social functions, rejuvenated, reanimated, and I don't know what that means. Maybe it means a genre of performance. This is a proposal about what I think the atrophy has been and where the animation might lie.

Andy Werner: I don't think it's so much about creating new rituals. For me, anyway, it's enough that someone goes and takes my cup out of the cupboard every day and drinks out of it. That's a statement that that person has some feeling towards it. If somebody uses an object every day, the same one, that means more to me than going to a museum and staring at something. It's a part of their every day life and they've chosen to enrich their lives with that object.

Kelley: It's not enough for me as a user. That's the equation of the potter-to-pot that's dominated ceramic discourse. I'm interested in including in that equation the user in an active, formal way.

Werner: In an art formal way?

Kelley: In an active, formal way. In an art formal way if need be. If art is the way that we circumscribe experience and make it self-conscious and interesting and provocative and dense, then I think we should circumscribe some of those things. It's not good enough for me that you're happy that I simply unconsciously drink from one of your cups.

Werner: I don't think it's unconscious, though.

Kelley: For me it is. Especially in the morning.

Werner: But as a critic, how can you say that? If you choose an object, how can you say that that's unconscious?

Kelley: I don't believe I *choose* an object when I get up in the morning. I just pour coffee in my cup.

Kristin Poole: It's not the potter's role to enlighten you about choosing the coffee cup.

Michael McTwigan: I think it is. I think their cup should provoke me in some way—otherwise I'll just use styrofoam.

Werner: What else can the artist do except make the thing and present it to you. It's your responsibility to enjoy it, to covet it, to do whatever you want to do with it.

McTwigan: But it makes it more difficult if they also, let us say, produce the same cup for five years in a row, which a lot of potters do.

Kelley: The point of my comments is not that cups should more brightly entertain my morning. The point is to attempt to define, as art in our culture, the theatrical potential of ceramics in some way that marks itself as being either different from or an intensified version of life or common use. It's an attempt to reinvest the common into the hierarchical categories of serious art.

Molly Major: What do you see as the role of galleries in this?

Kelley: To be as flexible as possible, in some of the ways they were during the late sixties and early seventies, allowing themselves to be used as the laboratories and the dung piles of process art. Maybe funding other kinds of non-object propositions. It was very interesting that Virginia Dwan funded Robert Smithson's travels all around the United States for a long time. I'm not condemning the gallery system per se, but I see the gallery as one space among many possible social ritual spaces that might be activated and catalyzed by the theatricality of ceramics, rather than crushing—like coal into a diamond—squeezing it into a precious object of metaphorical, collapsed and condensed consciousness. Those spaces in our culture, unlike in other cultures, remove art objects from any kind of discourse with life. I don't care about the objects that much any more. I care about process. It's only ever been in the context of process, and whatever ritual there is that surrounds this enterprise, that I've had any interesting experience with ceramic artists at all.

Rena Bransten: I think you fell in love with this wonderful act or the theatrics of putting the things in the kiln and everybody sort of sitting around the fire and seeing whether the pot was going to come out or not.

Kelley: It's not a matter of falling in love with it, it's a matter of trying to pay more attention to certain aspects of an equation, of creation, than others. One of the problems of critics in relation to clay is that the reviews paralyze the artist. The reviews talk about the vessel icon, which in our culture has nothing to do with function. It's an icon, it's a mode of display. Critics are required to meet the conventions of the marketplace, of the exhibition system, of the publishing system. Having written for the *San Diego Times* for two years, I'm very used to meeting conventions, not only about style and content, but length and speed. Those conventions have *nothing* to do with an aesthetic experience.

So, yes, in a certain respect I am in love with this rather than that. We all are. Certainly I've met and heard a lot of people who are deeply in love with the vessel as the end-all, be-all of everything on earth. But it's not only that. It's an attempt to pay attention to different aspects of an equation, an equation that includes the potter, the pot, and the user.

The Leach Tradition

McTwigan: What vessels are we going to use for models? Bernard Leach used Chinese ceramics as his model, specifically the Sung Dynasty, and his definition of the whole ceramic enterprise is that ceramics was the "never-ending search for perfection of form." So I want to ask Jim Romberg how Leach's model influenced ceramics in his own experience.

Jim Romberg: In my own beginnings at Pottery Northwest in 1967, somebody handed me Leach virtually the first week that I was there. Leach gave you references, and some sense of history and tradition....He begins to deal not only with material alignment—how could I throw a pot—but with the spirit of that piece, how that piece relates to the culture it is in, and the tradition that it comes out of. Then how do you want that form to participate in society? Once it goes out from your shop, what does it do? Does it sit on somebody's shelf? Does it bring tears to someone's eyes? Does it cause a revolution? I was fortunate to be around a bunch of painters and sculptors. So the information, the tap root, the things I started to graft onto were much more painting and sculptural things, because there was a real dirth of information about ceramics. *Steve Reynolds:* I too backed into clay in a rather circuitous manner and read Leach...and one of the things I found to be a shortcoming was something that John Perreault mentioned in regards to looking at art—the issue of psychological density. For me, it seemed that Barnett Newman had a particular orientation about the nature of the art process that I found much more substantial. As I looked at the most seminal activities going on in the sixties, it seemed paradoxically that the very issues a lot of those artists were addressing were quite resistant to the critical apparatus....So a lot of people had to turn to painting and sculpture, if you really wanted criticial models.

Jeff Perrone: I read *A Potter's Book* last year, and it's really interesting to hear that by 1955 no one was taking Leach seriously anymore. Yet everyone was still reading it in 1968. And I want to know, was this presented to you as a historical document that in the past people have followed as a guide, or were they giving it to you as a model that you should have been using then? Which was it?

Romberg: The thing I found of interest in reading Leach is that a piece of clay could have ideals and aspirations that go beyond what I call its material configuration. You're not just out there making something that can hold orange juice in a more interesting way. That had a big influence when you sat down at the wheel...what were you bringing to bear on this clay? You aren't just bringing the hopes of an industrialist or a car manufacturer, but other kinds of psychic, spiritual, metaphysical things you can conjure up that would fill out this universe.

Perrone: Leach connects three things. He connects healthy pots with healthy human bodies with healthy societies. And that is how your work radiates out into the world—in a healthy world or healthy society that has healthy vessels. So it was really a social structure that he was talking about. The only way society could be perfectly healthy was to have perfect vessels.

Romberg: I don't think people took it on as a social manifesto. I think it was just the fact that this humble pot could have those kind of parameters. The question was, how are we going to do this in the U.S.A. in 1968?

Klemperer: I was in on this, too, when I was at Alfred and we were struggling at the wheel. Val [Cushing] would read to us from *Zen and the Art of Archery.* [laughter] It was heavy Oriental stuff. And for me, what probably functioned like psychotherapy was Yanagi's *The Unknown Craftsman.* This bizarre combination of Communism, idealism, about government in art and folk art, all sort of jumbled together and stirred. And a lot of those ideas came from there.

But the problem we have not really faced is that this real heavy Oriental tradition, got transplanted on Americans. The Orientals had incredible religious traditions that were like a matrix that their craft tradition was embedded in. We lifted the crafts thing out, but we didn't have all those religious beliefs. Like the Shinto thing in Japan, where there's a spirit in everything—that's where this aura of the clay comes from. It's from Shinto.

We Need Broader Horizons

Romberg: In the fifties there was this kind of feasting, very broadly...and Voulkos talks about it, about listening to Miles Davis and jazz, and the Abstract Expressionist thing was feeding in. Yet the next generation seemed to be a narrowing down.

McTwigan: What's true on both coasts, and anywhere else in between during the fifties, is that first of all, you've got people coming to ceramics new. There was no real tradition of ceramics in the United States, or not much of one except for vase painting in Cincinnati, something like that. So these people—they may be painters, they may be engineers, or poets—they're coming to clay coincidentally, whether it's at Black Mountain or wherever. And they're open to a whole range of things—music, literature—so it's a very rich milieux for those artists at that time.

But the next generation is not as diverse; they're coming to study *ceramics.* They're coming to a medium that is now established and has a "tradition," although it's a very fractured one. It's a tradition that has a lot of gaps in it, because it *doesn't* include the figure, it *doesn't* include Sèvres, because those aren't considered proper. So the lack of diversity comes from the fact that these first pioneers didn't pass on their influences as well as they might. Maybe there was painting and printmaking and poetry going on in the studios in the fifties, but somewhere along the line it dropped out. Everyone focused completely on technique. What I remember about the sixties is the decals, the luster glazes. There was always some new process, and a continual desire to learn the latest technique that's going to differentiate your work from everybody else's. So we've got a time of fractured traditions and we don't have the rich soup of other cultural influences.

Viola Frey: That was the teachers' fault.

Romberg: I think we're in a situation where people are hungry. You can't just get it out of *Ceramics Monthly,* you can't just get it out of Leach; people are now reaching out to a lot of different things.

Joe Soldate: There was a tremendous influence in the fifties from Europe that's not being addressed here at all. There was a lot of information that was coming out....I remember reading about a fellow from Sweden who just poured slip into sand and then took the pieces and assembled them. It fascinated me, his kind of technique. Years later I found out about Solari pouring slip, and then Voulkos making parts and later assembling pieces. It took it away from this center of making a single object and it really freed my way of thinking and helped me. Jim has a great point there. I remember early on seeing people painting in a ceramics studio—you never see that now—or working on prints in a ceramic studio. This interaction. The dealing with issues of making a statement as opposed to being isolated.

John Perreault: One of the things I find fascinating about this discussion is that there's all this information being generated that I have not been privy to. I think a lot of ceramic information is oral because of the way it is taught and because of the lack of criticism. I'm trying to imagine what would this be like if we were painters sitting around talking about the fifties. We know all that information because it's gotten into the literature; whereas the things people are talking about here, as far as I know, are not in literature.

It helped me as a young critic to know about the club and the Cedar Bar and the influences that people had on each other, that deKooning influenced x and y and people would do anything to get to his studio. Things like that enrich my understanding of painting in that period. And I don't have anything similar about ceramics except the oral tradition.

The Lack of Scholarship

McTwigan: What did you mean when you said that ceramics is cut off from history, as well as from art?

Perreault: There's a tremendous lack of information about ceramics. People who teach it are constantly complaining to me, as I'm sure they are to you also, what texts can we use? Most people end up having to reinvent their own history, or Xerox pages from one book on ancient ceramics or one book on the Arts and Crafts Movement. I think there's a lot of real important work to be done in the ceramics area. As in museums, in most universities someone teaching the history of ceramics will be in the decorative arts division, where the art historical tools are

not as finely honed as they are in other kinds of art history.

There isn't much support for ceramic scholarship...there are very few rewards for ceramics as a scholarly discipline. It has come to be my understanding that the scholarly mechanism for paintings and sculpture is fueled by the direct and indirect ways they are used in the marketplace. So a few years ago, we had a new interest in, for example, academic painters from France, or certain half-forgotten American artists. Those kind of researches are actively funded, either through grants—certainly in terms of allowing people to do their doctoral work on certain artists, as opposed to others, and it's not by chance—that it directly feeds into the marketplace. I'm not sure that that is tremendously evil, but there is no similar interest in ceramics. The market is not rewarding enough; there are no collectors willing to endow chairs for ceramics, to finance books on ceramic history. That's a handicap....

The hot thing in the art world last year was Neoexpressionism, and before that, in the late sixties, process was very important and people like Robert Morris were doing artworks that emphasized the making of the artwork and working through time—these are all the things that have been important in ceramics right along. So there's a kind of threat that ceramics represents, and it might make certain kinds of art look less innovative if ceramics were fully acknowledged.

Gifford Myers: What about flipping it around...I mean, there's been a complaint that ceramics is a good fifteen or twenty years behind mainstream art.

Perreault: I see it as the reverse, actually....I think it's a question of articulation. Process is 3,000 years old.

Myers: Process is inherent in any sculpture making, but there's a time when it becomes the focal point.

Perreault: The difference may be that there haven't been any critical voices to bring those points out.

Myers: You're taking a very strong, chauvinist stance for ceramics. Maybe the problem lies with the people who work in clay, who have furthered the stigma by having clay shows, workshops, by taking the victim position, and by the idea that their work couldn't really compete with mainstream art....People in the mainstream are less dependent on the material they're working in. They deal with issues and ideas and emotions, without having to be married to the material.

Perreault: So, you're arguing for a more self-consciously intellectual approach and a greater sense of the worth of what they're doing.

Myers: I would expand it a bit by saying, to look beyond themselves and their material. That they are in conversation with centuries of painting before them, and with contemporary painting and sculpture made out of any material. If they want to be treated mainstream, they've got to think in a wider view than what cone it's fired to. The main reason that many galleries are starting to show ceramics is not because *they've* come around, but because the artists have come around and can now compete conceptually and formally.

I'm against the development of the history of ceramics because I think it continues to pidgeonhole this activity and keeps it a step-daughter activity separate from art.

Perreault: You're right, but unless we have this discipline developed, ceramics will be *forever* written out of art history. The Janson art history book is *finally* being revised to include ten women, but how long did it take to get that going? It's going to take just as long or even longer to have a textbook like that include ceramic work on an equal par with painting and sculpture. So it's an enormous battle, and one tactic is to encourage ceramic scholarship as a viable academic area.

Myers: But the minute you divorce it from other activities...

Perreault: I agree with you, but we don't seem to have any choice, because the textbook writers or the people who set up academic programs aren't about to say, "Yes, they're right, they're wonderful people; we've been neglecting this area, so now we will integrate it."

The Curators' Dilemma

Perreault: I would like to see a more activist stance on the part of curators. I know, from having worked in a museum, what pressures act against curators in America. But I really wish we had more aggressive curators in some of our museums, which means bucking the boss, the director, or being sneaky and getting around the board of trustees.

Bransten: We're talking about art, but we've avoided talking about power. We, the gallery people who represent the artists, think that the critics have a great deal of power. I suppose it sounds whiny, but in California, we don't get the attention we deserve from the Eastern media. It goes beyond ceramics. Ceramics are lumped into that, and they're just at the bottom of this heap, or at the top. If you ask, "How does the Whitney reverse its thinking about ceramics?" It's probably through economics—somebody dies who has a fantastic ceramic collection, or ceramics suddenly get to the marketplace and become very valuable. Unfortunately, nothing ever happens like that. It is a slow process.

It's very frustrating to, let's say, want to do a catalogue. When I had a show of Viola's at one point, I wanted to show she had done paintings all this time. Who would I get to write a catalogue that might be accessible who I wouldn't have to bring clear across the country? The one way to get an Eastern writer to know about Viola is to say, "Listen, I'm doing this catalogue. Will you come out?" And then they get hesitant and think, does that sound like you want to buy them off? I'm not addressing all the elements that have to do with power, but that's certainly one thing I'm very aware of in presenting an artist

from the West Coast to the country at large—that element of promoting an artist through the writers and through the media.
Perrone: But that's why the Whitney show got so much press. Because the show happened. All those people wouldn't have just sat down and said, "Gee, I think I'll write something about ceramics in California."
Frey: One thing that Patterson Sims of the Whitney said...I think it was Arneson who asked him, when he heard about my show, "Oh, you're going to do something for clay now?" And he said, "No, only for artists." He's saying they won't admit that there's anything other than sculpture. That's all he'll admit to. Even if it has a hole in it, it's still a piece of sculpture.
Perreault: They don't have any ceramics, they only have sculpture, is what I was told.
Bransten: They can't acknowledge that it's made out of clay.
Perreault: They probably defend the work by calling it sculpture.
Poole: He has to call it sculpture rather than call it clay, because clay is a second-hand medium. Why for God's sake can't we celebrate it, admit to the medium, instead of having to go around it?
Bransten: I think it's sort of back to the curators—that if you want to get good writing on ceramics, you have to get some good shows generated. That's what's hard, because ceramics are hard to move around.
McTwigan: The show in Newport Harbor recently ["Contemporary American Ceramics: Twenty Artists," curated by Karen McCready] was just another example of the kind of show we don't need, that says, "Here's a bunch of clay by a bunch of people." It doesn't have any intelligent handle. It just reinforces the idea that ceramics is a kind of free-for-all area where anything goes, where there's no guiding intelligence on the part of the artists...they're just doing their thing. There was a catalogue and it had nice pictures and it was beautifully designed, but the essay was just the same old apology for ceramics that you usually get when a museum has an exhibition of clay. "Oh, clay is a great medium, and we've neglected it." That doesn't take us any further than we were before.

Transformation and Modernism

Kelley: I think a more traditional way of valuing the ceramic enterprise, specifically making a pot, has to do with the process of transformation. I looked up the word "transformation" because I wanted to figure out if it was the same as another word we all use a lot, and that is "synthesis." Transformation, to my surprise, means an equation of terms of similar value. It doesn't mean that something is destroyed and something else better takes its place; rather form is exchanged, but the value is basically the same. So a lump of clay has a value and its value is reformed into a pot through the enterprise of forming. That seems to be a value that has been ascribed, especially in Oriental traditions, to the making of pots. By contrast, formalist criticism and modernist thinking in general have more to do with synthesis. Synthesis is not an exchange of forms of like value, but rather it is an oppositional conflict; it's a recomposition of lesser elements into a greater whole, or it represents, in more Hegelian terms, that moment when one thing recognizes its opposite and they reconcile their differences into something else. And that something else tends to be the synthesis of that collision, and thus better. So synthesis is a model of progress. Now Clement Greenberg articulated a critical model of progress, wherein everything extrinsic to a medium was washed out of the process. He wrote: "It seems to be a law of modernism that the conventions not essential to the viability of a medium be discarded as soon as they are recognized." In this model of synthesis, a lot of things get discarded from clay, including the function of a pot, possibly even the pot itself. This is the system of values and progress with which we in a modernist culture have evaluated clay art: in terms of the degree to which it represents something new, something that is more fundamentally an expression of the constituent properties of clay—for instance, the material, the way it responds to the artist's touch. *That* becomes the subject of the work, rather than just a process that transforms one thing into another. And that subject is better because it's more pure; culture has been washed out of the equation. That's the conceit of modernism; I don't think that's what actually happens.
So what ceramics has suffered under is that it claims for itself the value of transformation and we expect of it the value of synthesis. We recognize those works which express their synthetic constituent properties—Abstract Expressionist sculpture, Abstract Expressionist ceramics. We don't recognize (but I think we are begining to, because we talked a lot about pots yesterday) that there is also an inherent artistic value in a transformative act.
McTwigan: But synthesis allows new elements to come in. Transformation seems to be a closed system, and I think that's a problem. For if transformation is, indeed, the model for most ceramic-making, then it can very easily degenerate into pure process—transforming the material.
Perreault: We seem to be accepting certain definitions of modernism without question. The value seems to be that modernism as expressed in painting and sculpture is better than what people have been doing in clay, in terms of the vessel. One of the things that intrigues me about twentieth-century ceramics is how it diverges from what we call modernism. Ceramics may be the biggest critique we have of the standard definitions of modernism.
McTwigan: How would you relate that to, say, decoration art—Joyce Kozloff's tiles, for example?
Perreault: If you're going to define modernism as the impulse to synthesis, her work fits into that category. She's taking something from outside what is supposedly legitimate and collaging it together.
Perrone: She juxtaposes; she does not synthesize. They are entirely different.
Frey: I would like to mention Gaudi...he used a lot of clay, you know, and except for maybe the last five years, the architectural schools called him an eccentric.
Myers: It seems, in the face of knowing better, these people proceeded to do something that is bad, or just unhip. There's a tragic romanticism to it, and I'm going to tie that to the show you all curated [an exhibition at the Sun Valley Center Gallery selected by Rena Bransten, Jeff Kelley, John Perreault, and Michael McTwigan]. With the exception of one piece, everything is a vessel. Most of the work is very steeped in the ceramic tradition. It's a wonderful, tragic romanticism that you're willing to go down with the ship that you know is wrong.
Kelley: Going down with the ship, that's interesting.
Myers: Vessel. I said ship, but I meant vessel. [laughter]
Kelley: I'm very much part of the modernist tradition, as I believe we all are. I'm not saying it's better; I'm saying it's part of the drive of the modernist model to become better, to continue to synthesize itself into everything it can. I don't think that's better. I'm just saying that's been a problem for a tradition whose values are rooted often in a transformative kind of activity. I think a lot of critics are trying to move away from both the center of that which keeps ceramics out of the mainstream, and the center of the mainstream itself. And so we find ourselves in some real weird and often indefensible peripheries.
McTwigan: One of the ways in which ceramics has been outside the modernist discourse—and if that's good or bad I don't know—is in the idea that ceramics is somehow indescribable, that words cannot do it justice. I don't know where that comes from, but it certainly prevents discourse.
Klemperer: That probably comes from the Zen tradition, or from a Western adaptation of it.
Myers: Why can't people in ceramics let go of the Zen thing? What the hell does Zen have to do with you, a white woman in American society in 1985? It's a groovy concept, but think about it!
Frey: And it was very masculine in Japan.
Myers: What's this transformation that's so different in ceramics from what it is in painting? I mean metaphorically. In painting, you're taking the paint and hopefully doing more than transformation, because if you're doing transformation, you're painting a billboard. It should become more than what it is. In my humble definition, that's maybe a good piece of art.
Perrone: There is a difference in ceramics...and that's firing.
Myers: Oh, that's magic hocus pocus...that's Zen! What are you talking

about?
Perrone: When you make a painting, everything you do that happens on the surface with your material, you can say the person is responsible for, the person who pushed the paint. If you give over part of what you're doing to something else, which is the firing...that is, if you claim a certain part of that process, that transformation, is not something that *you* are doing, then it's different.
Myers: Is that different than sending the work out to Lippencott and having them do the piece for you? In the end, you have to decide whether it's your work and whether to let it out or not, whether it expresses what you had in mind.
Frey: What about paintings that get varnished and wrecked? What about Rothko's early paintings, which were sent unstretched and then stretched. So when you look at an early Rothko, the edges are worn. In a way, ceramics is set; it's not going to be varnished.
Perrone: If you look at Mondrians from the twenties, they're supposed to transcend their materiality and be like spiritual moments. Instead, you look at the surface and it's all cracked and yellowed and varnished. Because it has a life in the real world, in the real material world, it goes through that kind of decay. But it is not part of the process of making the work, although some artists have made it part of the process, because they've come to realize that inherent in the real life of the work, you have to account for the fact that it's an object in the world that decays and cracks. But modernist painting usually says, "No, art is something that transcends the moment. It's outside time or timeless." I like the fact that ceramics is fired, because it acknowledges that at a certain point during the process, it gives itself over, it is out of the hands of the person. It's an acknowledgment that is not made so much in painting—that it has a life of its own, that it's an object.
I don't get fired in the oven, and that's why I don't think the human metaphor is such a good one. Because part of the process of making ceramics, whether it's a vessel or not, is that it gets fired. At that point, the projection of human form onto it ceases to make any sense to me.
Perreault: I'm surprised to hear this mysticism.
Perrone: It's not mystical. I don't say the process stops there, it doesn't end at the kiln. You retrieve the information. You get it back. You get it back in a different way. You haven't gone in a circle. That's why the spiral is in Mimbres pottery, because they understood that the object has a life....At a certain point you are touching it, and at a certain point it goes away from you, and after that it goes through whatever it goes through during the firing, and it comes back to you. But it doesn't come back to you the same. So it's not circular, it's a spiral.

Our Problems Are Not Unique
Reynolds: I take humbrage with the idea that "ceramists are easily bruised," as if we're a special category of tender little psyches that can't stand the rigor of the art world. I'm not sure I feel comfortable with that. It's an apologist's stance. And in terms of redefining what clay was doing, I think a parallel development would be the Abstract Expressionist painters of the fifties: the radical position they were taking relative to their own history as painters; the necessity to reëstablish critical models, trying to explain what a lot of people dismissed as monkey painting or insanity; all of the negative commentary they received. I don't think they had any more support in the fifties than ceramists did in the sixties. Our problems are no more unique or distinctive than their problems were....
Frey: In New York in the late fifties, you could always sell a piece of ceramics, and I don't think that was true necessarily of the painters and sculptors.
Werner: One week you make your production ware that you know you can sell on the street corner, and then when you have more time or the opportunity, you can make your objects of art for $500 to $600. Almost all the people I know work that way, and I think that leads to a lot of confusion. Because you *can* make something for $10 and you can make it for $500, whereas a painter or sculptor can't do that really, they don't switch as easily as we do.
Reynolds: They switch to prints. [laughter]
Perrone: Artists make their reputations on their individual work, a unique one, and then because they get successful, they'll be asked to do the hack work, the prints. That's their $10 cup. It's the reverse.
Werner: You go to any ceramic studio anywhere and you will see the mugs, then you'll see the gorgeous sculptures, and you don't see that in paintings.
Kelley: The difference is that the painter who makes a print has already been evaluated as being successful.
Myers: If you can always sell your product, it makes your attitude toward it different than if you're doing something that you know you can't possibly sell.
Frey: That's right. You don't reject, you have second sales.
Myers: Once you've started having second sales, that creeps back into your thinking that you're making work for second sales.
Frey: Yeah. Even Peter Voulkos...I have one awful, awful thing he made for second sale, sold for a dollar.
Myers: That's called no pride, isn't it?

Artists on Criticism
Kelley: As an artist, what has been your personal experience with critics and criticism?
Reynolds: My work has never been critically reviewed. Although I have an avid interest in criticism, it's always been a vicarious activity—reading what's been written about other people's work, and maybe paraphrasing an application to my own view. But it's been a very impersonal one. I'm not bitter about it, it's just an interesting phenomenon. It might also have to do with there being no criticism where I

live and work. There's nobody that writes...not even a newspaper. I think a lot of places suffer from not having access to that critical apparatus. So you read criticism like literature or fiction, because it's vicarious. You can't rely on what is said about your work, so you become your own best critic....That kind of objective distancing is crucial. The danger is you become kind of incestuous, because you're talking to yourself. That's why it's nice to read criticism about other people's work, because it provides models that might not be part of your own makeup.

Poole: Don't you have peers that give you criticism?

Reynolds: No I don't, not in ceramics. We've had a lot of very thoughtful painters who have come to Texas. That's always been my primary connection, really, to painters....I like talking to painters. I like what's said about painting.

On the other hand, I'm not saying we don't need criticism, because I think that there are certainly impulses in ceramics that just cannot align themselves to painting. So there's a real purgatory that a lot of ceramics activity labors in, because you don't know how to form the critical questions to ask yourself.

Vernon Patrick: One of the most satisfying things that has happened to me is meeting the people who have purchased my work. I'm always very impressed by the amount of knowledge and sensitivity and understanding they have. They kind of work as critics, too. I don't know if that really fits into criticism, but the people who buy your work are making some kind of statement about you as an artist.

Greer Markle: Do you think critics play a role in developing that sense of understanding or knowledge in collectors?

Patrick: They did for me. Where I come from, the first thing an artist has to do is to get a show. When you get a show, you've got to get somebody to review it. Usually what happens is they compare your work to somebody else. Your next goal is to get them to talk about *you*. Eventually, if you become recognized, they compare your own work to your earlier work; that is really important. To me it was very instrumental.

Most people think if they work in a university, they've got a great support system. It's probably the loneliest place in the world to be. I have all types of students, I have very little dialogue with my faculty, most of them I don't understand. To keep growing as a professional aritst, a critic is very important. I respect their knowledge. They put it into a broader spectrum.

Peter Kuentzel: The idea that a critic completes the piece...I get kind of disturbed by that. If the critic doesn't see it or talk about it, in a way it doesn't happen.

Reynolds: I give due consideration to what's said about the work, but then you must do more work and have the strength of your convictions.

Myers: To me, criticism is similar to artmaking in its potential for creativity, as is collecting. It doesn't make any more or any less out of the piece that I've already made. In that sense, criticism is a very separate issue. I am interested in reading criticism on work that I've seen, so I can see how what the critic has seen corresponds to or argues against what I saw. Criticism adds to my experience of the work.

I often get uncomfortable for critics who feel themselves in a defensive position. That may or may not come out of a term that has been used for critics—parasites. To call them parasites is to deny their potential for creativity. I don't buy that. I buy that they have their own creative activity that's separate from mine.

Reynolds: Of course, you could also have a very perceptive curator. There are other people who are very eloquent, very perceptive, and very articulate who don't call themselves critics. I don't know whether that responsibility must constantly fall upon the critics. There's some absolutely beautiful writing by artists, very insightful and often quoted. Insightful information can come from a number of components in the art world. I don't think we need to defer totally to critics. There might not be enough of them to go around.

Artists Lack Ambition

Perreault: One thing that bothers me a little bit about people who work in clay is what I perceive as a lack of ambition. By "ambition," I mean in a specific sense, in an art terminology sense. For instance, I once took part in a glass conference in New York City and I started showing some slides—trying to delineate my interest in glass and ceramics—of the work of Joyce Kozloff and Patsy Norvell. And there was an instant uproar. There was terrific resistance and anger that Joyce Kozloff, whose training was as a painter, had taken something that was in the province of the crafts, in this case ceramics, and had "ripped off" the crafts; that Patsy Norvell, who was trained as a sculptor, was ripping off the glass people. What were these people kvetching and complaining about? That material was there. Why didn't the people there in the audience have the ambition to make works on that scale, works that could fail on that scale, if need be?

Kelley: How might criticism help them to not feel that way?

Myers: To point out to them that in the greater spectrum, they're in the greater arena. To stop thinking of themselves in such a small way; stop speaking to people who only know how it was fired, and try to speak beyond the material.

Major: I find that clay artists go to clay shows, glass artists go to glass shows, fiber artists go to fiber shows. They don't go to painting exhibitions. They must do that, if they want to be compared to other art forms. They've got to interact with other artists.

Myers: An extension of that is the critic's responsibility not to just write within the context of ceramics, but to equate it with other media.

Perrone: Everyone here has said they wanted criticism that was not personal. They said they didn't think critics should know the artists or talk to them....They wanted some objectivity—I don't know if that's the word—but they didn't expect critics to hobnob with artists before they wrote about them. And that's very healthy.

Kelley: If it is a question of hobnobbing, I agree. However, I think it would take a lot more time and a lot more discussion to determine whether knowing or speaking with artists compromises one's judgment and one's craft as a writer. I think the contention that the further away from a person a critic is, the better the criticism will be is an outrageous one. I've written about many people I care about, and I've written about infinitely more that I don't know, and I'll argue with anybody about my integrity in either situation.

Patrick: I think the critic's responsibility is to know the developmental process—what the artist has done, the body of work—and put it all into context.

Perreault: I think some of the most important things I've learned have been through artists. Usually I know a little bit about their work first. But certainly if I'm writing an article, which I hope will be in depth, I make it a point to speak to the artist. I'm not afraid that I'm going to be seduced or influenced by what they say. I have a very good bullshit detector. I enjoy meeting the artists and I'm interested in, not only when their words correspond with what I see their art doing, but I'm also sometimes even more interested when there's a gap between what they think they're doing, what their line is, and what I see the work is doing. So I usually find it a very profitable experience, whether I write about the person or not.

Critics on Criticism

Perreault: I think it's very hard for critics to get things published about clay and ceramics. When I was writing for *Soho News* in New York, I had pretty much freedom to write about what I wanted. At that time, there were very few ceramic shows I could write about, because the unwritten rule, and usually it is when you write for a newpaper, whether weekly or daily, is that you must write about such things that the public can *see*. And you can justify that in various ways. One being that, the reader can check you out. The other one being, which is never stated, that we can maybe sell ads that way. But anyway, there is that unstated rule. In terms of writing for the art magazines, it's almost impossible to get them to accept at all.

Perreault: There's a dependency on the art magazines that originate in New York City. Those magazines are dependent on the New York international art market, and clay hasn't penetrated that.

Kelley: I think we as writers address clay in terms of the controversy it engenders in relation to our culture. It has been a controversial medium, it's been on the periphery of the art market, the art center. It's interesting that something

could come out of traditions from somewhere else that are very old and collide against the systems of our culture and make certain kinds of shock waves and be responded to by those systems in a repressive way. That's very interesting. I don't think the question is whether critics should write about clay as clay, or as art. I think we have to address controversies of those value judgments.

Perrone: I think you have to say that it's clay. I was trying to think of analogies. Imagine reviewing Scott Burton's show and not mentioning that it's furniture. It would be an insult. It's insulting not to talk about the clay aspect of something made out of clay. Just treat it like it's art.

Myers: Which comes first, the clay or the sculpture? Which comes first for Scott Burton—furniture or granite or formica?...I'm still confused as to how sculpture and ceramics can be two different things.

Perrone: Because not all sculpture is made out of clay.

Klemperer: And not all things made out of clay are sculpture. There are toilet bowls, there are nose cones, tiles.

Perreault: We all agree that ceramic something-or-others, whether they're vessels or objects, can be art...but how do you convince those who do not believe, who automatically dismiss anything because it's made out of clay? If it's made out of clay, it simply will not be accepted.

Soldate: Unless it's reviewed by someone with credentials.

Markle: How about this concept about art critics becoming extensions of conceptual art?

Major: Or doing away with the objects; we could just put you guys up on the walls....

Kelley: You mean crucify us? [laughter]

Perreault: I've often said as a joke that the best underground, underacknowledged artist of the fifties was Clement Greenberg...and that only works as a joke if you know how much input he has had on the studio practices of certain artists. But I only mean that as a joke. Beyond his writing, he helps artists in framing their unstretched canvasses, he helps them decide which way is up on the canvasses, and I would only say that he was making an honest attempt to surprise people. After all, the artists are free to take advice from whatever quarters they want. But it's the artist's responsibility in the last analysis.

Perrone: Writing on ceramics should not be kept in a ghetto. I can do something about that. But I can't do anything about the ghetto thinking of ceramists; they have to let it go. Writing about ceramics must be confrontational. I can do something about that. But I can't force others to rise to the challenge of that confrontation. If there is to be a dialogue, any dialogue, there must be highly defined, closely argued points of view in conflict. Other people will have to take responsibility for responding. Other people will have to take responsibility for shows that include objects made of clay. I cannot do that. But I need such shows as material to continue writing, so I hope they appear. A curator is a kind of critic, too, and a show must offer a highly defined point of view, not a big happy family hodge-podge. If there are disagreements, they must not be confined to the oral tradition of the ceramics community, they must appear in print. That is how dialogue is generated to the public.

What I have learned here are the vast differences between how ceramists are educated, what they have been exposed to in their developmental stages. There is a diversity in the history and geographical attitudes of ceramists, and the influences are much more diverse than I had thought. It is interesting to know that from my reading of the literature, I was not aware of these differences. The existing literature gives the impression of a united front, which is false. If ceramists are willing to go beyond the gossip of the studio, they must begin to air their differences in public as well.

Bransten: Well, I am not a writer, so I thought I'd scramble around and find something to read that would extend what I got out of this conference and other conferences as well. What became stronger in my thinking is that ceramic shows are not the answer. I feel that ceramics must be viewed as part of a whole. I will read these two critics writing about this. One is a critic who saw the show in Newport Beach. It says,

This exhibition impedes acceptance of clay because it limits itself to ceramics and makes the medium the message. It serves to compare one ceramist's work only to that of other ceramics. Some of the art looks visionary and full of vitality, as McCready asserts. But the true value of such work reveals itself only if it is placed in the larger context of contemporary art and art history....As a final result, she [Karen McCready] argues that ceramics should remain separate as much as equal, a category of art distinguished from painting and sculpture by virtue of its medium.

And that's what we seem to be saying again and again. We love clay and we want to see it become legitimate and yet there seems to be always this dichotomy of separating it and yet wanting to put it in the mainstream.

The other thing I'll read is a review by Tom Abright of the Whitney and San Francisco Museum show in 1982.

Group shows built around a central theme like clay, or California, inevitably carry a load of political baggage. But the opening of "Ceramic Sculpture: Six Artists" at the Whitney in December, turned out to be a bit like the first shot fired at Fort Sumter. Hilton Kramer, echoed by other East Coast critics, blasted the show in the New York Times *with the old dumdum of provincialism. West Coast writers retaliated with shrill volleys of indignation and sarcasm, verging on hysteria, thereby reinforcing our reputation for parochialism, not to say paranoia. Craft partisans also entered the fray, charging*

mainstream critics like Kramer with snobbishly resisting the use of clay itself as a medium of "high art." This discussion carries ironic echoes of the misguided battles that generations of photographers have waged to win a piece of the recognition so long monopolized by painting and sculpture. Ironic because photography is a relatively new and mechanical medium, whereas clay is one of the most ancient and most personal; and misguided because what needs recognition most urgently now is not new categories of art, but how few real artists there are in any medium, including painting and sculpture.

He then goes on to say, also in line with what we've been saying about influences: "Shards of many influences appear in the early pieces of these two sculptors"—he's talking about Voulkos and Mason—"Picasso's painted ceramics, themselves based on early Greek and Roman models, the traditions of Oriental pottery, particularly in Zen, with its courting of the accidental. But the energy that draws everything together clearly flows primarily from Abstract Expressionist painting."
And then the last paragraph says: "Although their work would be unthinkable in any other material than clay, Voulkos, Mason, and, more equivocally, Arneson, achieve an expressive and formal power in their best sculpture that locates it solidly within the mainstream of contemporary expression, ranking with the past two decades in any medium or area of the country."
Disjointedly, what I'm trying to say is that that split in all of our minds, of defending ceramics and wanting to protect it as a medium is not helping ceramics. Because by having these large group shows which lump people together, it doesn't really do anything for the medium. I mean it just gets picky and further isolates, or makes our thinking more insulated.

What Can We Do?

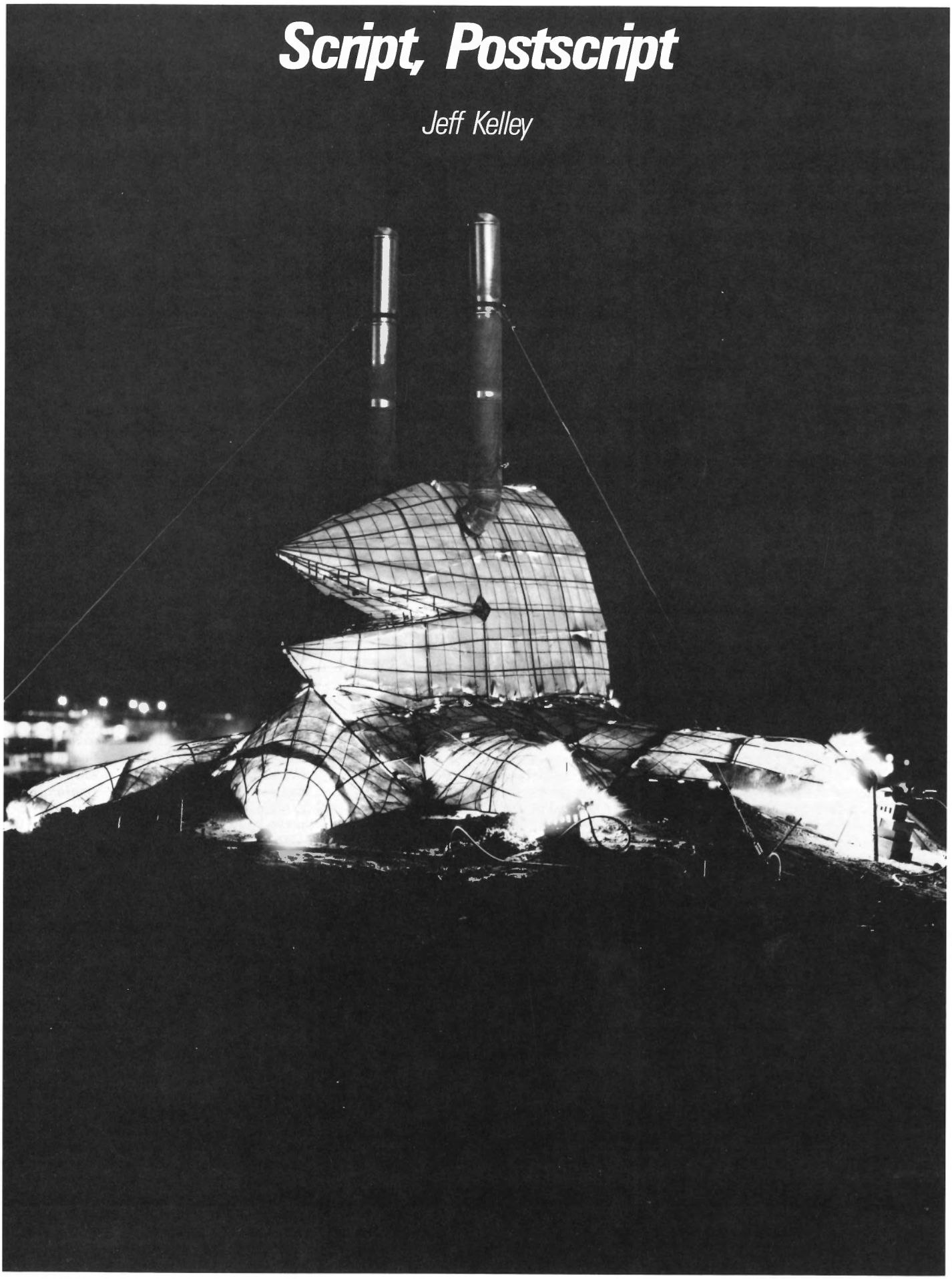
Romberg: You used the term "cheerleader criticism" to describe the vacuum in clay writing. What will be the stimuli to move criticism in another direction?
McTwigan: If you don't see the work, it's pretty hard to know much about it or be able to respond to it intelligently. Unfortunately, it is hard to see a lot of ceramic art, on the East Coast in particular. There are just not that many exhibitions. A critic really needs to have a relationship with that object. I think that's one of the things that's unique to critics—they have heightened perceptual and analytical abilities that allow them to really focus in on something and see what's going on there. They are very sensitive to the object and the ideas behind it. But you have to *be* there. One of the roles of criticism is to take people *there*—to that object, to make it present to people who are not with the object.
Romberg: What's going on to push critics in that direction?
McTwigan: My own particular strategy is to call on critics all around the country and say, "Look, there's going to be an exhibition at this gallery; I've read your writing and I really like it, and I thought you might be interested in reviewing the show." And they say, "Well, let me think about it" or "Let me see a copy of the magazine." So I send one and I tell them a little more about the artist. They usually call me back and say "Yeah, I'd like to try writing about this work." That's the case with a number of the writers who write for the magazine.
So my strategy is to get critics around the country involved by letting them know that there's work out there that might be worthy of consideration and offering them a place to publish that writing. I really take most of the craft magazines to task for not encouraging that kind of criticism. They either take a very anti-intellectual stance completely or they just throw up their hands and say, "Well, there are just so few good writers around, we don't know where the hell to look for them." They don't actively seek out good writing. They seem to think, "Let's just present the object and that tells the whole story." That point of view just doesn't work, it doesn't lead to understanding. If you want clay to be understood by a wider audience than the subculture of the craft world, then they've got to be able to learn and read about it.
Frey: One of the things, really it's very simple, is to subscribe to good magazines. Cancel *Ceramics Monthly*, subscribe to *American Ceramics*. The clout of a magazine is their subscription level. Two cups—a whole subscription. Or make sure that the libraries have it. Otherwise the publication disappears.
Betty Asher: I was just thinking of things I can do, to carry on after the conference. I have two plans. One is to talk to the curators at the L.A. County Museum of Art to see if I can't stimulate them to do more, faster. They are doing a little, but they're doing it slowly. I'll try to find out how to get them to surge ahead. Then I thought I'd talk to the head of the Archives of American Art in Los Angeles and try to convey the importance of getting material from ceramic artists. Those are the two things I'm going to work on.
Reynolds: I think there's been a real timidity to take chances on new artists, even in terms of how academia works. The same ten people keep doing the workshop circuit—you know, Ken Ferguson, Don Reitz, Paul Soldner—the Feldspar Circuit. And sometimes what they do is debased into a curious form of entertainment. There are all kinds of very young, thoughtful people whom no one will take a chance on, because they don't have that profile, that ability to draw an audience. A lot of it is entertainment. Bring in the big names so you can sell tickets. That is something that *has* to be broken somewhere. But I'm very optimistic. There are people who are willing to take chances on unknowns...and there are a lot of artists who define themselves by taking a considered stance against the heroes of the fifties now. They don't want to be anything like them. That's a moral stance, but I'm not sure that it's been totally supported.

Criticism Begins at Home

Barbara Diduck: I think that artists need to become their own advocates. At the beginning of the conference, I got the impression that we were expecting the critics to provide us with answers. One of the things that we as creators need to do is think more about writing ourselves. We're all experts and we need to think more critically about our own work...and also be willing to take a chance, to do some exploring on our own, so that the critic is not simply a kind of tool or spokesperson for all of us. I think there are already institutions and vehicles in place that we can all plug into; for instance NCECA. Every year in the spring the board gets together and reviews proposals for a conference. Anybody in this room could submit a proposal.
Frey: I think criticism has to start from the very beginning, as beginning artists or students. I think that you should follow models for viewing artwork: Never say like or dislike. Write down things you hear in your studio classes. Make appointments with each other, exchange time on a very formal basis for viewing and writing down the critiquing. Use Jeff Perrone's pattern of structural analysis. Use Merleau-Ponty; read the good writers, maybe even read Garth Clark.
But understanding the history is different from critiquing and viewing. See if you can look at an ugly piece. See if you can look at something that isn't ugly for half an hour. Can you talk about something for half an hour? You'll be surprised at what happens when you're forced to look at someone else's work or even your own for that length of time—you'll be surprised at how much of looking is not concerned with perception. An art object consists of all the different times that it's viewed. Everyone in art should know the basic visual elements do not in and of themselves necessarily make an art object. The cultural part is what weighs it and makes it into art.

Script, Postscript

Jeff Kelley



The names of minerals and the minerals themselves do not differ from each other, because at the bottom of both the mineral and the print is the beginning of an abysmal number of fissures. Words and rocks contain a language that follows a syntax of splits and ruptures. Look at any word long enough and you will see it open up into a series of faults, into a terrain of particles each containing its own void. This discomforting language of fragmentation offers no easy erosion of the poetic principle. Poetry being forever lost must submit to its own vacuity; it is somehow a product of exhaustion rather than creation. Poetry is always a dying language, but never a dead language.
Robert Smithson

Script

I invoke the words of Robert Smithson as a shield, even though I know they will soon crumble around me as I try to explore the fissures in my thinking about ceramics. At bottom, I think ceramics is a verb-tensive complex of traditions, activities, and objects, and that a pot, per se, is something like a conjunction that anchors, by virtue of its capacity to wait, both the artistic process that bore it and the rituals of public and private use that satisfy its social role. It is in this active state that pots are closest to their inherent theatrical potential. While a cup defines and holds its center, and thereby speaks of psychic balance, it also casts in relation to itself the concepts of "periphery," "boundaries," "actual space," "position," "displacement," "disuse," "fragments," and even "ruin." Beyond the space of contemplation lie the spaces of transaction.

The processes of building and using a pot are more interesting to me than the pot itself. While a modern pot is an object of process and a subject of its possible uses, its actual function is to display itself within the collapsing metaphorical spaces of modernist culture. At the same time, a pot implicates the space and time of its display in a conceit of function, and this is why modernist culture is so afraid of pottery. For as much as anything, modernism is about an ideal secular space that reduces religious incantations to a sequence of rational operations. Pots will always threaten these privileged spaces with ceremonies of common use.

The utility we fear from pots has little to do with our violating an artwork by drinking from it. Rather, we fear the function of an art that inhabits our kitchens by riding the backs of the objects from which we drink. In other words, we fear the power of art to disrupt the rational composition of our public and private space and the logical sequence of our time. An image fixed on a pitcher becomes apparitional when it is carried across the room. Perhaps the wine it pours is sweeter. The image is part of a narrative of use, its patterns corresponding to those of common movement. As a water jug is carried from spring to dwelling, it not only animates the act of drinking, but cuts through space like a colorful bird in a way that incites the ritual of gathering and touches both the source and destination of a human need. The modernist notion of function in art, on the other hand, is not of our everyday use of a sacred object, but of its sacred use of our everyday environment. We fear an active art. It would require of us, as John Perreault has put it, "the burden of constant aesthetic awareness."

In his book, *Ceramics*, Philip Rawson makes what is for him a fine but fundamental distinction—that between a "concept" and an "act of mind." He defines a concept as an asensual category of historical thinking that is retrospectively applied to the artifacts of human culture by archaeologists and art historians whose interests do not, and probably cannot, account for the practical and symbolic value ascribed to such artifacts by their makers and users. By contrast, he asks of us a sympathetic leap of imagination, an *act of mind*, by which ceramic objects uprooted from the graveyards of dead cultures may be reinvested with a sense of their previous functions, if only as apparitions in a conscious dream. In effect, Rawson's act of mind is an attempt to animate the spaces of history, to resurrect, as far as possible, the transitive and transactional spaces of culture from the collapsed categories of art history in an effort to reframe ceramic artifacts as agents, rather than objects, of consciousness.

"Theatre," wrote Michael Fried in his 1967 defense of modernist painting, "is now the negation of art." I think theatre, and especially a theatre of social function, is now the negation of modernist space, and that pots are, and have always been, inherently theatrical. They are born dramatically and perform in relation to the spaces they inhabit. When not in use, they function as the custodians of ceremony. A pot is a prop that animates the space it defines and the time it involves, and potters should more aggressively extend the ceremonial capacity of pottery beyond the dense metaphorical spaces that lock so much ceramic art into what Christopher Knight has called "the tyranny of the merely personal."

To reanimate pots, we cannot simply review process or preview function in the space of metaphor alone. An active ceramics will catalyze the space and time of its own creative process and its intended social functions, and will thereby equalize the artist and the user in a shared discourse of ritual. Perhaps one such ritual will be, should be, the smashing of an occasional pot, and the return of its shards to the muck bin.

In order to resurrect function in art, we need to distinguish between art and craft, and then to discard the craft aesthetic as an end in itself. We confuse craft with function because, in the context of modernist space, an art object is not supposed to "work." Its purpose is to display itself. Since craft is an expression of work, and work is very often the means by which a useful object is fabricated, we have decided that function results in craft. In the context of American art, the art/craft debate is circumscribed by the broader ideological conflict between form and function. This latter conflict has been reconciled, to some degree, under the rubric of "process," in which the practical function of an art object is transformed into a rhetorical one. A chronology of the object's creation is substituted for the actual patterns of its use, and function is thereby bleached of its cultural earthiness. In this sense, the modern creative act is a representation of the lost functions of art.

What does an American potter mean in 1985 when he or she calls a just-completed ceramic object "functional?" Probably, that it's not just sculpture, or maybe that it's also not "just" a pot. Or maybe that it's just a pot, but not "useful"; rather, it's a pot conceived around the formal issues of its own display. Or maybe the damn thing is actually useful, made for the kitchen, but with a pinch of sculpture added. In our culture, a truly useful pot is destined for psychic oblivion.

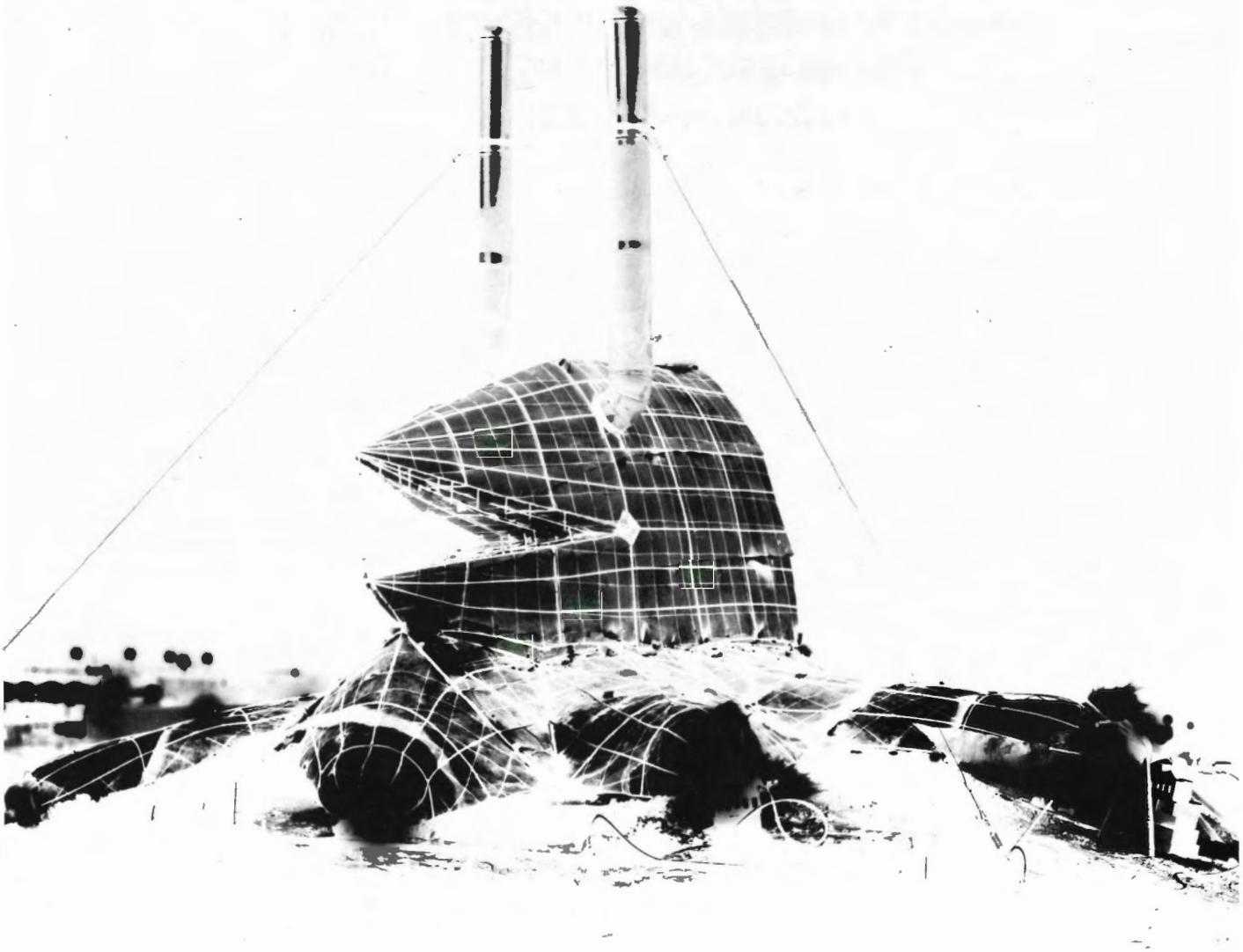
An assumption of the modernist ethos is that the gallery is a context for an appropriate contemplative experience in relation to an object of art. In this context, an art object represents a focused consciousness insulated by the gallery from the white noise of civilization. Without even the self-consciousness of irony, the gallery erases the world into a powerful and privileged absence that frames the presence of Modern art. In 1985, this space is crushing.

Of the artist's time, Smithson also wrote:

For too long the artist has been estranged from his own time. Critics, by focusing on the art object, deprive the artist of any existence in the world of both mind and matter. The mental process of the artist which takes place in time is disowned, so that a commodity value can be maintained by a system independent of the artist. Art, in this sense, is considered timeless, or a product of no time at all. This becomes a convenient way to exploit the artist out of his rightful claim to his temporal processes. The arguments for the contention that time is unreal is a fiction of language, and not the materials of time or art.

It is true that we don't have the cultural contexts, spaces, and times necessary to frame process and function as objects of the ceramic enterprise. But we do have the activities that may be framed as ritual: we eat, drink, store, gather, and haul things that keep us alive. If potters want function to reenter the equation of art to life on the backs of their pots, they should stop complaining about not being part of the art world and shape the rituals we so desperately need in this one. They should provoke acts of mind in the present, suggest spaces for the ritual of social function, and critics will fill those spaces with the split and ruptured syntax of their words.

"I think theatre, and especially a theatre of social function, is now the negation of modernist space, and that pots are, and have always been, inherently theatrical. They are born dramatically and perform in relation to the spaces they inhabit."
Pictured: Two views of Ancient Shoreline/Island for Lake Lahontan *(1985), Photo: Elke Morris.*



Postscript

My presentation didn't have much to do with the Sun Valley conference. Nobody was interested in the space of ceramics or its theatre of function, at least while a row of art critics and gallery dealers was seated before them. Other things were on the minds of those who sat and listened and waited and sometimes spoke. At bottom, many of the artists in the audience were a lot more concerned with critics than with criticism, and with what criticism in relation to clay *should* be, instead of what it might be. There seems to be among ceramic artists a deep and pervasive mistrust of the printed or spoken word as it pertains to, and sometimes surrounds, squeezes, and even crushes, fragile objects of clay sculpture—objects that are too often steeped in an anti-intellectual tradition in which a certain swaggering, even macho muteness is substituted for critical articulation.

This muteness does not, of course, apply to all ceramics, but it was a factor at Sun Valley, and reminded me of other ceramic silences in other times and places—and I do not mean the mystical "silence" of the Oriental pot, but rather the stubborn heroic silence, akin in many ways to the wordless "acts" of the Abstract Expressionists, of sculptors locked out of the art world and into a real world in which the lost social functions that once animated their objects, objects that were once only and effectively pots, have been cancelled by modernist aesthetics of form and function. Somehow, these artists hold critics, generically, accountable for their isolation from the art world, and they establish a boundary of silence around the already mystified aura of their objects, equating emotional "honesty" with truth. Again, this is not a prevalent condition in ceramics, but a notable undercurrent. In a recent issue of *American Ceramics*, Jack Troy seemed to speak, with tongue in cheek, for those who mistrust critics when he wrote:

Leery of intuitive inklings, befuddled with that peculiar loneliness that accompanies incomprehension, we need our hunches buttressed with paragraphs of solid scholarship, for only when an art object is verbally validated can it assume status as a commodity with aesthetic merit in our culture.

Few critics would dispute this. But equally few set out to buttress hunches with paragraphs designed to fit art objects into some art-market architecture. Instead, we very often use words to approach art objects, to give form to our hunches, to articulate not only our understanding, but also our befuddlement, and those lonely objects of ceramic art are always complicit in this discourse, even in their most extreme forms of muteness—in which case bad critics try to seduce them into the world of describable ideas with layers of verbosity and eloquence. So the critic tugs and the object resists. Troy is not wrong to council caution in regards to criticism, but overcaution results in the kind of self-righteous muteness that deadens art and refuses to acknowledge the many-leveled conversation that artworks incite. (Yes, Greenberg used words to seal art in formalist canons, but he also rejected the "literature," the extra-pictorial content, of artworks; and this literature is inherently contingent and conversational, it involves more kinds of language than simply the "essence" of this or that material or thing. If ceramists want to seal themselves into a second-rate, formalist self-criticality—the monologue of objecthood—that rejects the kind of open discussion that opens up art to both itself and its audience, then Greenbergian formalism is the appropriate model, and I'm sure the mutest of ceramists would be shocked to know this.) In good-natured response, a critic might say to the artist: "But you started it."

And yet, over the two and half days of the Sun Valley conference, it became clear that artists don't know what critics do, or what criticism is or can be. In fairness, it must be said that many critics don't know these things either.

Typically, artists think that critics (1) advance artists' careers, (2) practice journalism, (3) enjoy writing reviews, (4) provide some kind of professional objective opinion that artists can't get from their naturally biased friends, (5) are an unfortunate necessity, and (6) are failed visual and literary artists. Artists think criticism is (1) somebody else's opinion, (2) a notch in the rifle butt of one's career, (3) intellectual masturbation, (4) B.S., and (5) occasionally interesting.

Indeed, critics do and criticism is all of these things, and none of them. It depends on who's counting. The fundamental illusion shared by many artists (and some critics) is that the written word either serves the art object or violates its "ineffability." The idea is, if art needs words to define it, then it doesn't "work."

At the conference, it became apparent that what was at stake for many artists was this sacred romantic notion that art must ultimately resist any analysis by means of language. One artist even suggested that all the galleries and art magazines be shut down for five years so that artists might make more personal and, presumably, more honest work. This assumes, of course, that (1) art can be purely personal, (2) that the most personal art is necessarily the most honest, (3) and that aesthetic honesty is somehow uncorrupted by language. But nothing is this simple either. Granted, there is a difference between a lump of clay and a sentence, and it has to do with inherent properties of each that cannot be traded back and forth. But clay is no less a language than this essay, and it can and should be resisted by any and all means—including words—that may be employed to understand it. The best art is never crushed by such resistance, but strengthened. It is pressed to function at its highest level as a language open to interpretation and analysis. It becomes dialectical instead of just different, and avoids "the tyranny of the merely personal."

The tradition of the mute artist—which is a residue of romanticism and an outgrowth of formalist criticism—is dying hard, especially in ceramic circles. With critics such as Jeff Perrone, John Perreault, and Michael McTwigan attacking both art and criticism that sees value in only the truths of given materials, ceramics has become—despite its tradition of muteness—an important model for the investigation of the relationships among languages that carry meanings from different times and places. The conventional discourse of the "ceramic center," which allowed formalist critics to ignore clay for decades, is being shattered by such critics.

At Sun Valley, Perrone attacked the myth of the center in Mimbres pottery (a standard of ceramic thinking); Perreault challenged artists to be their own critics; McTwigan hastened the end of "cheerleader criticism" in the ceramic world. It's an interesting time for the relationship between critics and ceramic artists, but many artists—steeped in the counterproductive mythologies of muteness—seem not to notice. But whether they know it or not, they are locked into a subcategory of formalist criticism for which the myth of ineffability is a key. They can unlock it with new words, as creative people always do.

For me, criticism is a practice in which one language engages another—typically, a written language engages a visual one. They are equivalents engaged in mutual resistance. Art generates controversies of style and meaning that become the subject matter of criticism. In the generation of those controversies, art often becomes criticism itself; at its best, such art becomes a criticism of the criticism. And by engaging the controversies of art, the best criticism also becomes art.

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Exercising the Critical Muscle

Janet Koplos

Partisanship used to be the most basic problem of clay criticism: those who wrote about this underdog discipline did so with fawning sympathy. Partisanship still exists, in the form of defensiveness, but conditions have changed. Now the most basic problem is a more sophisticated one—uncertainty about what criticism should be and what work is appropriately subject to it.

Criticism is as slippery an eel as art itself. It's hard to speak clearly about it. But a good place to begin is to name the assumptions under which critics operate.

Criticism applies to art purposes. The work under consideration is regarded as art, not as interior design or sociology or engineering, and is dealt with accordingly. That's not so obvious a concept as you might think. Most clay criticism published in the last thirty years, for example, says more about lifestyle than it does about art. Of the first monograph on a clay artist, Rose Slivka's *Peter Voulkos: A Dialogue With Clay,* someone accurately observed, "There's so little aesthetics in it!" The book concentrates on people and events.

Function presents a problem for clay criticism in the art context. Certainly critics can talk about the visual aspects of a functional work, but they cannot evaluate its performance, so they address only half of the work. Warren MacKenzie used to say that a pot could be analyzed like any other three-dimensional object, but a few years ago he changed his tune, and now insists that function must be evaluated, too. Yet only rarely does that happen (as when Garth Clark wrote about a Betty Woodman cup he owns and uses[1]). The gallery and museum exhibition context prohibits evaluation of function, and the critical response has been either to ignore this aspect of the work (not even acknowledging that it is being ignored) or to deal with function as an intellectual abstraction that relates to the meaning of the work, rather than as a concrete, physical aspect.

Criticism requires a certain type of writing. I think it does, but not the sort many writers presume. "Prestigious art criticism" is hastily adopted as a model by inexperienced or uncertain writers who mimic this style because they know their subject is still low on the New York art world's hierarchical family tree. They hope by adopting the recognized style, their writing will not be accused of being retarditaire, even if the art form is.

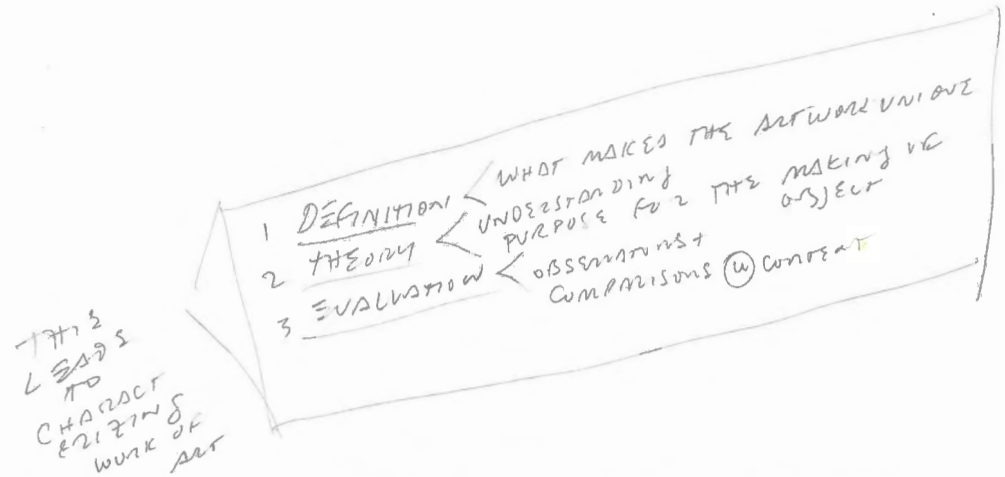
What is this prestigious art criticism? It is writing that seeks and values the new, that is frequently prescriptive, that tries to isolate art from its environment, that assumes the unpopularity of current art has more to do with the stupidity of the public than with any flaw in the art, and that assumes art is fully expressable in words. The extreme example is the infamous, impenetrable *Artforum*ese. This kind of art criticism most often uses elevated language. The more big words, the more jargon and name- dropping, the better. The phrases "I don't know," "I don't understand," or "I'm not sure" are not part of the critical language; unlike the rest of us humans, these critics are always sure.

Of course I'm generalizing; no critic or publication can be so easily characterized. But Clement Greenberg is still championed for his prescriptive success. Robert Pincus-Witten exemplifies the arrogant tone. Robert Morris writing about his own work is either impenetrable or terminally boring. Semiotics, deconstructionism, and the mere mention of Wittgenstein are often signal flags of this kind of criticism. An italicized quote at the opening of the article, while not a conclusive sign of unintelligibility, often signals the prestigious style and functions as a self-awarded badge of erudition; overused, it reveals that the author feels inadequate to express the quoted idea in his or her own language directly. The valid use of the quote occurs when, for example, Philip Rawson uses a Wallace Stevens poem as the pivot around which to construct an essay[2]; that is, the quote is integral to the essay, not merely decoration.

The good writing that criticism requires is only the clarity and directness to be understandable and sufficient vividness to hold the reader's attention—the good craftsmanship required of any functional writing. Derek Guthrie, publisher of the *New Art Examiner,* has said that a piece of criticism must "demand to be read." But a strong lead paragraph is not in common currency. In general criticism, I would credit Time magazine's Robert Hughes as the contemporary master of vivid expression (and, fortunately, clear thinking). In the current pages of clay, Ed Lebow is far and away the master of the striking phrase, and his persuasive analysis backs it up. His essay on Val Cushing is loaded with gems, beginning with one of the funniest metaphors I've come across: he writes that Cushing's lidded pots are "among the most gracious couplings of tops and bottoms since King Edward VIII chose Mrs. Simpson over the throne of England."[3] I think all critics should have tee shirts made up with his phrase, "Rotten diction weds syllogisms to sire gibberish."[4]

Criticism requires good thinking. For, in fact, criticism *is* thinking—generalizing and categorizing, seeing relationships. Criticism might be divided into three functions: definition, theory, and evaluation. Definition deals with what makes the art form unique, and a great deal of clay criticism is devoted to this topic. Theory attempts to understand the purpose for which the artwork is made, such as expression, social concern, personal growth, or formal investigations. Evaluation deals with the more limited sphere of a specific artwork's characteristics, but enjoins to the other two functions because it involves observation and comparison and can only be expressed through qualities of the material and the work (that is, definition), and those qualities are given context by reference to some standard (that is, theory).

Criticism is response to art, a public articulation of the instant,



intuitive, and often unspoken judgment that all viewers make of every artwork they see. Fundamentally, critics offer opinions, which they seek to substantiate by evidence, reasoning, or cunning (giving opinions, by itself, is a much more mundane function). A critic's reasons are based on standards, although these standards are not laws. They vary from critic to critic and change with time. They are simply a framework of notions allowing the critic to make a unified and coherent approach within an article and between articles. Standards are like scaffolding—they are temporary, auxiliary, and disposable—but they are not the building stones of art. There are no "laws" of aesthetic judgment. Karl Aschenbrenner has called the promulgation of aesthetic laws a "whoring after false gods." He argues that critics *characterize* artworks, they do not simply describe them.[5] A description is objective and visually verifiable; a characterization, by contrast, is the critic's response as a person to the work. It reveals as much about the critic as it does about the artwork.

Criticism serves an audience. To whom is clay criticism addressed? Is it written for the general public? (almost never, I'd say); for that segment of the public at least mildly interested in art? (yes, in the case of newspaper criticism outside New York City); for artists, curators, collectors, and other art- (or craft-) world functionaries? (frequently, especially in specialty publications such as this one, and in newspapers of New York and other art centers). Is it addressed primarily to other critics? (There is a fair amount of this in art criticism and a lesser amount in regard to clay, but still some. This essay, I might note, is addressed to other critics, although the editors and I presume it will be of interest to all readers of *American Ceramics*.)

When we have identified the presumed reader of the criticism, we can guess at what the reader wants and needs to know, and therefore what the approach of the criticism might be. For instance, *Ceramics Monthly* has concentrated on technique because they assume their audience of makers is most interested in that subject. But we must always bear in mind that criticism has both short- and long-run applications.

As a product of clay's particular circumstances right now, an inordinate amount of space and time are devoted to its history and to the defense of its status, rather than to definition, theory, and evaluation. Apparently, this is necessary for an underdog art form. It may seem that it is deflecting attention from aesthetics, but perhaps it is this still-present need to explain that keeps clay criticism from falling into the pits of obscurantism and posturing so prevalent in art criticism. What are the limits of clay criticism?

Vocabulary. The vocabulary of clay criticism is still underdeveloped, and as both writing and thinking require it, so the development of vocabulary will go hand in hand with the development of clay criticism. Defining terms is the first step to knowing—naming the factors from which direction (theory) and achievement (evaluation) can be deduced.

All alone back there in the 1940s, Bernard Leach made an effort to define, to move "Towards a Standard," in his seminal work, *A Potter's Book*. He theorized meanings of this work in contemporary time, and he offered a standard by which the result might be measured. Leach expected the pottery to explicitly reflect personally established values. Actually, his was a religious content (though not adopted as such in America). The important innovation in his approach was the expectation that pottery would be personally expressive and therefore separate from design, from industry, from folk manufactures, and be aligned with fine art. His pottery is not as significant to contemporary clay as this critical concept was and is.

Looking back over thirty-five years of writing in the American Craft Council's magazine, *Craft Horizons*, now *American Craft*, reveals stunning change. In the 1950s, the magazine wrote about lifestyle. It was the wealthy do-gooder's magazine, and craftspeople were introduced as interesting specimens of cultural divergence. The closest thing to real criticism was the occasional technical commandment, delivered in a pedantic voice.

The field changed before the writing did, but former editor Rose Slivka's greatest contribution to criticism was the move from sociology and pedantry to poetry. To some degree, the style of her own writing, and of Richard Howard and other poets she brought to the pages, was a pendulum swing too far in the other direction—sometimes sailing right past the reality of the work in flights of poetic image-forming. But their acknowledgment that ceramics, even if functional, could create an emotional environment helped to reinforce the perception that clay was a bona fide art form. And Slivka offered strong encouragement to those who would abandon function—a risky move then, although hindsight tells us it was an inevitable result of the freedom of personal expression.

Historical Context. Even with these changes, vocabulary remains limited among those of us writing about clay. When I read a piece of critical writing about sculpture, I recognize its complete applicability to works in clay; but it reaches deeper into purpose, meaning, and method than clay criticism. We lack the intellectual terminology and the analytical distance that comes from seeing a particular work as part of the sweep of art history. (The one specific contribution of Garth Clark to clay criticism has been his *Century of Ceramics in the United States*, because his analytical ordering structured clay's history in terms of artistic qualities.)

There is a kind of innocence to much clay criticism, a by-product of the movement's easy-going accessibility. Even as the work becomes more sophisticated, it continues to be addressed in terms of formal qualities and emotional qualities—the characteristics most easily identified—rather than in terms of the meaning that

motivates art. Clay criticism tends to encourage feeling at the expense of thinking, as if they were mutually exclusive categories. It may be that the work will again lead the way: the historicizing tendencies of so many contemporary clay artists may forcibly introduce critics to the knowledge, the historical sweep of time, that will at last enable us to discard defensiveness.

On the other hand, historicism is a precipice: an object refers to precedent, but if all it does is quote the past without some resolution that is contemporary, it is poor art. Critics, likewise, are not historians; they must deal with precedent without restricting their readership solely to the cognoscenti, devotees, and experts. Who needs that? Neither artists nor critics serve a purpose if they talk only to themselves. And do we remember that one of the strengths of clay was its accessibility? Is it still?

"Inarticulate" Artists. Until recently, clay artists were presumed to be intuitive creatures. They were of little help to critics because they were often inarticulate, and the influence of their own writing on critics was negligible. One exception was Richard DeVore's too-brief article on Betty Woodman in *Craft Horizons.*[6] I still see a tendency for artists to maintain this simplicity and spontaneity, as if acknowledging intellection would spoil clay's natural, primitive naîveté, its earthy materialism. This is pretense, and DeVore is the quintessential example of a thinking artist who has not in the least harmed the expression of his natural material.

Lack of Confidence. Weaknesses in clay criticism often amount to no more than a lack of confidence, and it's then that a turn to the "experts" may be helpful. They may instruct by negative example: a review so loaded with references to obscure philosophers and their more obscure theories, for example, that only ten people in the whole country are able to follow it.[7] Or, by contrast, a review may provide a model. For example, Kenneth Baker's article on Beverly Pepper was instructive to me because it paralleled issues in clay, but went deeper.[8]

Depth. Consider Baker's discussion of stacking. Stacking is often mentioned in clay criticism because Voulkos stacked pots to achieve sculptural mass. That's important, but it's not all that could be said. Baker writes of Pepper's standing sculptures:

By stacking forms, she prompts the viewer to question the possible significance of one thing's resting upon another—to decide what in her work can be counted as base, or whether the conventional distinction between base and sculpture applies here at all....Wondering about what might be taken as a base element is one way of beginning the process of visual interrogation and rephrasing that these sculptures are meant to stimulate....This kind of perceptual shift—rephrasing what you see initially—is basic to an experience of Pepper's standing sculptures: it is a question of rereading their sequences of forms with changed emphasis, as a passage of melody or poetry may be reread with shifts of stress and rhythm that change its sense.

Here Baker has helped us see the purpose of stacking, what it accomplishes visually, the metaphoric expansion of meaning, and the richness of multiple "readings" that make the artwork worth coming back to again and again. Use these comments as a measure of Tony Hepburn's stacked forms.

In another striking connection to ceramics, Baker notes Pepper's references to the works of other artists: "Their allusiveness is the expression of a collegial spirit, a respectful and appreciative acknowledgment of other artists' accomplishments that appears very rarely in contemporary art." Such collegial spirit is, on the contrary, quite common in ceramics, but is often regarded as a weakness! Baker goes on to describe this spirit in the "familial aspect" of Pepper's work when shown collectively. Again, this is true of ceramics. I think especially of Robert Turner's works. Baker doesn't simply conclude that this is anthropomorphic, however, but looks harder at what it means: "It is a sculptural analogy to the common humanity, rather than to the physical individuality, of her work, inspiriting rather than alienating." So it is with Turner's works, but none of us clay critics have managed to say that. Clay criticism is prone to make the first, surface observation of meaning, to say "funk is irreverent," without asking why, and what it means, and why it takes this form. A good example of our evasion of hard thinking is the absence of color theory—meaning and justification of choices—in ceramic work. Saying Nagle uses 1950s linoleum colors is just not enough.

Structure. Reviews need clarity of structure; the reader should be able to find a main point. And they should fit the work into a larger structure—a social or psychological or political framework, to answer the question: why does this matter?

Besides model art criticism such as Baker's, much can also be learned when an art critic reviews clay. Occasionally it reveals an embarassing lack of knowledge about current work, as when British ceramist Andrew Lord was fawned over in the New York art press. But just as often the "outside" critic sees clay with a freshness that clay critics lose in their closeness to the field (this, in fact, is a strong argument against a critic writing in one field only, which unfortunately has been the practice in all of the crafts). For example, in Donald B. Kuspit's review of "A Century of American Ceramics,"[9] he notes the "elemental realities" and "primordial character" of clay which we clay critics revere, but he adds the metaphorical and almost metaphysical notion of clay's "passage of purgation" through the fire. Further, he writes:

It is perhaps because ceramics gives equal billing to touch and

sight that modernist aesthetics, with its emphasis on vision, treats it as inferior. Yet modernism also emphasizes the specificity of an artist's touch as the signature of his artistic making, the sign of his work. In the end, for both modernist painting and sculpture and for ceramics, the artist's touch is more fundamental than the image he creates. It is the subintentional dimension of the work that determines its subtlest appearance. Because the ceramist's touch is so visible in both the surface and the substance of his objects, his art is perhaps the most self-evidently modernist of all.

What clay critic has the knowledge or objectivity to write something like that?

The real dilemma of clay criticism is to increase the depth, the philosophical ramifications of our criticism, without degenerating into an unintelligible code-language. Criticism that stands out does so because it is more specific, really digging into one particular work (take as a model Thomas B. Hess's analysis of a single painting by David[10]) or because it is more broadly analytical, dealing with tendencies of the artist's style as a whole.

The critical muscle—whether observation, extension, or expression—like any other muscle, is strengthened with practice. And that's why only now are we seeing more than occasional isolated examples of good clay criticism (and useful writing by artists). Before the advent of this periodical, there was no place where a critic had the space and the regular opportunity to exercise. Space is important, because no one ever developed a critical theory in 350 words. Also important is the community of ideas, the continuity of exchange created by regular writers in such a periodical, which works to develop lines of critical thinking.

All these limits of criticism...yet remember that clay itself is young as an art movement. And note the curious lack of "masterpiece madness." Is that good or bad? I mean that we don't speak of paradigm works in clay, through which we reference others. It's rare even to speak of works by name. Voulkos's *Gallas Rock* might be a candidate, or Ken Price's *Happy Curios*, yet we speak of their works, like everyone else's, in general and in mass. We refer to Sperry's style, or Frey's, or Hafner's, or Kaneko's. Arneson comes closest to being identified by individual works, and isn't it interesting that he is closest to full art-world credibility? Does this tell us something about clay?

Ultimately, this discussion of criticism is limited and limiting. We've talked about it. Now let 's get on to the real subject: art using clay, upon which clay criticism is wholly dependent.

1. Garth Clark, *American Potters: The Work of Twenty Modern Masters* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1981), p. 26.
2. Philip Rawson, "Vessel as Center," *American Ceramics*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 28–31.
3. Ed Lebow, "Val Cushing," *American Ceramics*, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 15.
4. Ed Lebow, "A Warning to Readers," *American Ceramics*, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 21.
5. Karl Aschenbrenner, *The Concepts of Criticism*, (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1974), p. 16.
6. Richard DeVore, "Ceramics of Betty Woodman," *Craft Horizons*, 38, February 1978, pp. 28–31.
7. Nancy Marmer, "Northern Revisions," *Art in America*, September 1984, pp. 23–27.
8. Kenneth Baker, "Interconnections: Beverly Pepper," *Art in America* April 1984, pp. 176–179.
9. Donald B. Kuspit, "Elemental Realities," *Art in America*, January 1981, pp. 78–87.
10. Thomas B. Hess, "David's Plot," *New York*, May 9, 1977, pp. 101–103.

Janet Koplos, a frequent contributor to American Ceramics *and several other art journals, now resides in Tokyo, Japan.*

Carolyn Daniel

Carol Beesley

Serriform Series Table I *(1984), 22" x 19" x 19", earthenware, slips, glaze. Collection Nancy Olney, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Photo: Sanford Mauldin.*

During a recent visit to Norman, Oklahoma, Ten Randall talked about the "reality" of a pot, that in the making of a pot, the artist focuses without the quasi-identity crisis of those in the modern period who battle between the real and the abstract. The works of Carolyn Daniel have this certain sureness of focus about them. They are limited in basic forms—mostly handbuilt platters and small, functional tea tables, but within these shapes are many distinguished variations.

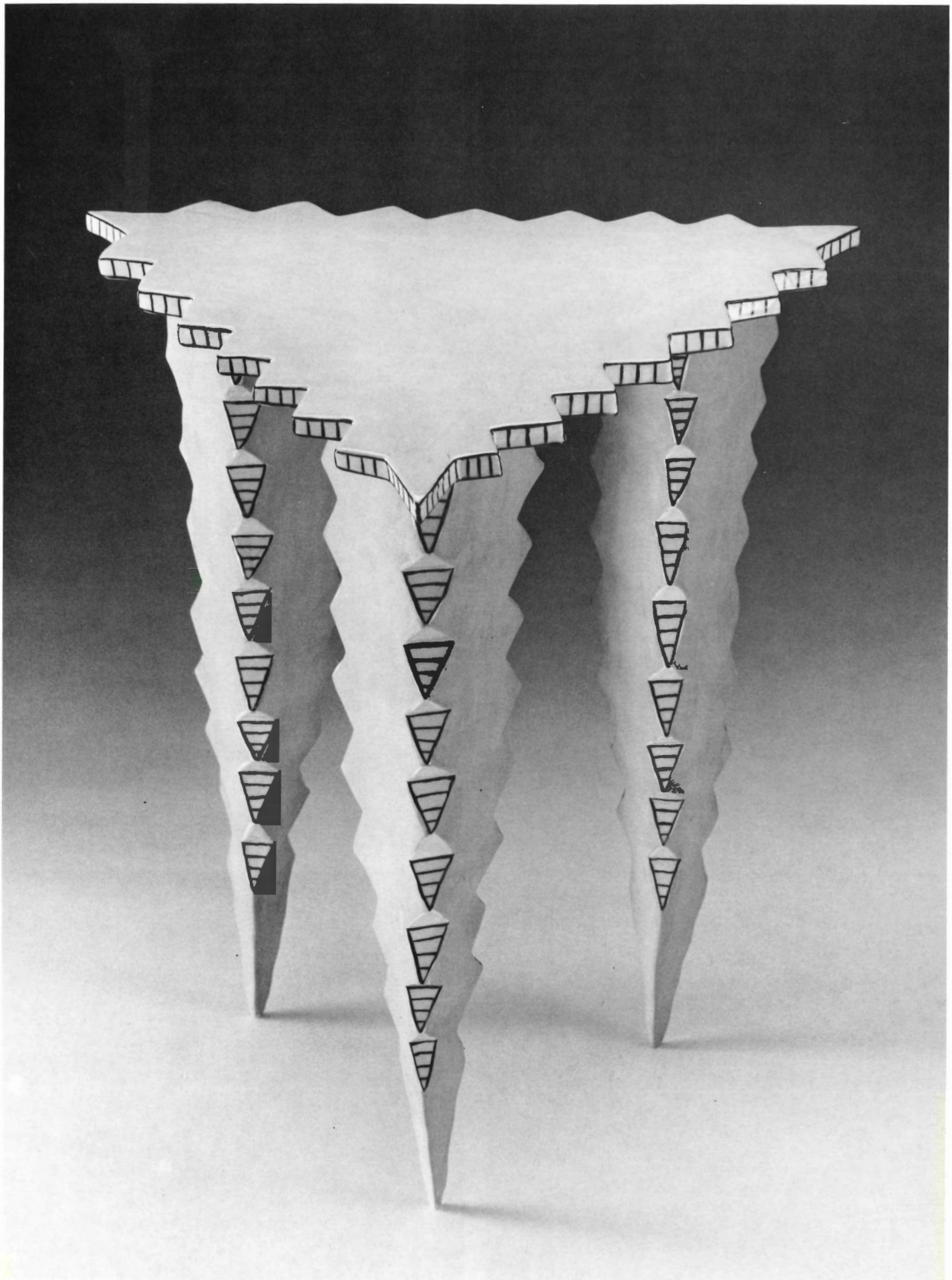
The oblong platters are displayed on the wall. The lip curves up to contain the brush-stroked designs that are flicks of engobes made by a bamboo brush. Sometimes the emphasis is on the rim, sometimes in the center. The presence of the platters is dramatized by a thrown foot of about two inches which keeps them out from the wall. The lowfire glazes are rich and thick as if dipped from vats of beautiful bright paint. Small details are both spontaneous and calculated. For instance, in one or two platters, she gouges the surface. These indentations, which in shape resemble the brush strokes on other platters, are glazed differently and the juncture where the two meet becomes critical.

In her square platters which stand on four feet, the viewer is aware of many small details. The bits of broken pottery embedded in the surface could be another example of the art world's most popular cliché, except they are used sparsely and carefully. They do not have a *horror vacui* effect, but delicately reinforce the surface decoration or the rim. She sometimes uses her own specially made "found" shards, making marks which repeat a larger motif. Parts of the surfaces are left unglazed and are then smoked. These areas often show flashings of pastel greens and pinks from trace minerals in the organic matter used in the smoking.

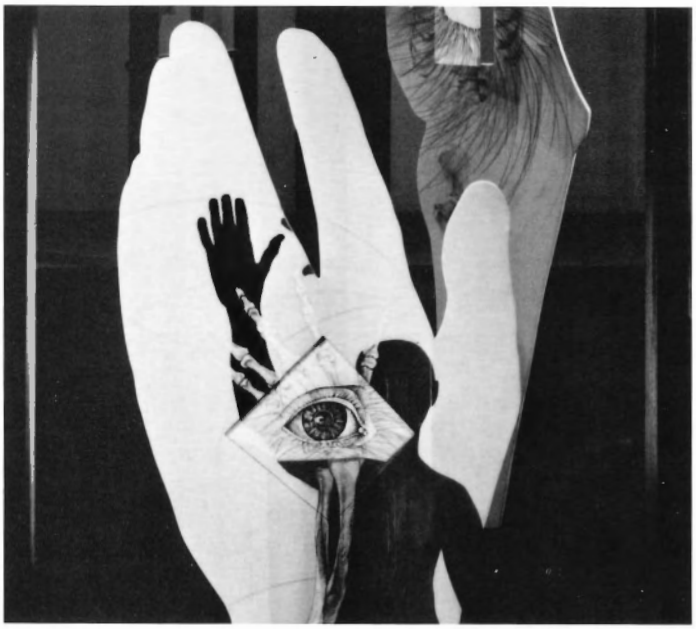
The most ambitious objects are the functional tea tables. It is in these tables the artist's sense of humor is most evident. The legs are slip cast then attached to a handbuilt triangular base. The legs come to points and give the table an airy, insubstantial quality, as if it might levitate at any moment. Alice and the White Rabbit would have taken their toast and tea on one! They are both useable and totally decorative. In "Serriform Series Table II," she has carved the legs and edges of the top. These provide a perfect vehicle for what the artist calls "a lyrical integration of form and pattern." Glazed in snow cone colors, they are charming and a little ridiculous.

All the works in the exhibit show an interest in traditional ceramic forms and a contemporary design sense. The pieces have the reality and sureness of pottery and surfaces which echo folk art, Memphis silk screen designs, architecture, memory, and speak of someone who look at everything in her world very carefully.

Carolyn Daniel's work was shown at the Oklahoma Design Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
Carol Beesley is an artist teaching at the University of Oklahoma, Norman.



Right Passage *(1984), 10 ft. x 8 ft. x 24 ft., mixed-media installation. Photo: Frederick Marsh.*



Deborah Horrell

Gary Wells

One of the most striking images in Deborah Horrell's installation *Right Passage* is that of a winged skeleton etched on the glass of a black door. That single image has a tremendous power, a concentration of meaning that touches the viewer. Yet, that skeleton is paradoxical and ironic; it is funny and compelling and morbid all at once. However, the visual absurdity still contains enough logic to make it plausible, perhaps because the image summarizes our own anxieties and desires, perhaps because it touches the nature of our own existence. The skeleton door is an image of death and escape, the threshold that promises some other existence. Like the partially opened doors in Roman sarcophagi reliefs, this threshold offers a promise of hope but does not reveal the ultimate truth. The winged skeleton may suggest an answer, but it, too, is an elusive image.

This elusiveness suggests a richness of content, and it is this richness that makes Horrell's work so intriguing. The images are replete with allusions, but they are not forced upon the viewer with superficial pretentiousness. There are enough fascinating details to occupy us for some time; but the work, the total effect, is the sum of those details. The enclosing form of the installation, a peaked-roof black frame, is that of a house, or perhaps it is a church or a temple. A gesturing hand invites the viewer in, or is it a gesture of caution, or a gesture that resists the viewer's intrusion? To one side is a window through which we see the past, an image of one of Horrell's earlier works, *Flesh and Bones*, traced on translucent porcelain panels. Like the stained glass of cathedrals, the window tells the viewer a story of sorts. It shows us a nest of bones, an image about beginnings and births as well as an image haunted by the shadow of death. The metaphor here, as in the winged skeleton, offers a summary of the artist's ideas, a condensed image of the idea of the installation.

In the center of the work is a standing figure with a heart of porcelain. Through the veins and arteries flow tiny triangular thorns. The heart itself is a tiny door, hinged and, like the skeleton door, partially open. A wing hovers above the figure to suggest some process of transformation, or is it the promise of escape, or the indication of some angelic being? This is the stuff of religious mysticism: transfigurations and transformations and, yes, passages. Horrell's images of angels, wings, feathers, bones, and skeletons might be the product of mystical contemplation, but there is an element of irony and even humor that disarms and contradicts this mysticism. Maybe it is the juxtaposition of the physical and the metaphysical that creates this irony. How do we transcend, or transform, the physical? The heart is the romantic soul, but it is also the physical organ which sustains the physical body. Wings are angelic, but also a fact of physical nature. Just what is the anatomy of an angel?

It strikes me that *Right Passage* is much like a reliquary. It is both sanctuary and object. It contains relics of great spiritual power, and it is a center of intense intellectual and emotional concentration. Indeed, the relics here are not unlike those medieval saints' bones and sacred hearts and assorted holy objects. We contemplate upon them and through them, not for what they are, but for what they suggest about an unknown realm. The passage of the title is not just physical, and it is not just ritualistic. It is the intellectual leap that takes us beyond the physical object. And like a reliquary, the installation is a kind of vessel, created by a controlling artistic logic in order to surround and contain the idea.

A Vesalian skeleton etched on a Duchampian door is a hybrid that teases the viewer's tolerance. Such is the idea of absurdity. But the image focuses our attention upon the essential ideas of this work. Beyond art there is history, beyond life there is an unknown. Artists make history conform to their own vision. Is this not a process of making oneself immortal? Deborah Horrell has given us an image that suggests both history and immortality. She has tried to draw us into her vision with art, she has tempted us with beautiful passages of lyrical form and exquisite craft. She has given a glimpse of the past as well as a hint or at least a hope for the future. And through her images, Horrell has given an elusive message about life to bear with us as we leave, or is it escape?

Deborah Horrell is an instructor in ceramics at Ohio State University at Columbus. Her work will be featured this year in exhibitions at Cleveland State University and Ohio State University.

Gary Wells teaches art history at Ohio State University, Columbus.

Rocky Road *(1985), 4" x 20". Photo: Roger Gass.*

Inner Thoughts, Outer Actions *(1985), 5" x 14". Photo: Roger Gass.*

Sherry Karver

Janet Koplos

The bowl and the platter are the most common, predictable, and presumedly "limited" of ceramic forms. But the renewal of interest in these forms by artists who previously explored figurative, constructive, or other abstract modes in clay demonstrates that the vessel still offers formal and expressive possibilities to creative ceramists.

Five years ago, Sherry Karver was making complex, reedlike structures with titles that suggested emotional readings. Those works were striking, sometimes disturbing. They stressed construction and color tone, and played with framing empty space. But she is now making vessels, and while they sometimes dicker with illusions of space, they are vastly different from the almost matchstick character of her earlier works. Those had concentrated on form, but the current double-walled vessels—most deep bowls with a few reclining toward the platter format—are not primarily developments of form. Certainly they offer a kind of notation on what is sometimes called potter's space—the regular enclosure of a cone of air with the resultant heightened consciousness of inside and outside—amplified by the inaccessible hollowness of the double walls and further complicated by the irregular non-match of inside and outside walls. But that's just a bonus. The real focus of Karver's work is the specifically ceramic subject: these works are about the interplay of surface with three-dimensional form. The two aspects generally coexist in a swinging, dynamic balance, but when one slips into dominance, it is usually surface.

The vessels shown at Atlanta's Chastain Gallery have a corpulent character, with thick, rounded rims and fleshy irregularity of exterior walls. One instinctively recognizes even the smallest reflections of the human body. Yet these are only reflections; Karver does not identify the body directly, but sneaks the implication in as an enrichment.

The glossy surface rules out the suggestion of skin, and so does the web of lines that wraps each object. Colored, and in relief, these strands are sometimes abrupt and curtailed like the profile of an electrical impulse, are sometimes parallel and segmented like bamboo, and are sometimes imprecise and seeping outward like spattered paint or dribbled frosting. But in each case these markings make a sort of cage for the swollen walls, and even in the cases where the lines themselves do not set up a tension, the counterpoint of slender line to turgid form creates it. An exhibition of these objects, under light, has a pinging impact, little bursts of presence and energy.

The volume of the vessel wall sets these works apart from others that use surface markings to suggest cosmic, indefinite space—for example, the bowls of Christina Bertoni or the platters of Dennis Mitchell—because the wall, although hollow and lightweight, outlines what would usually read as mass. Thus the wall concretely anchors the form to existence.

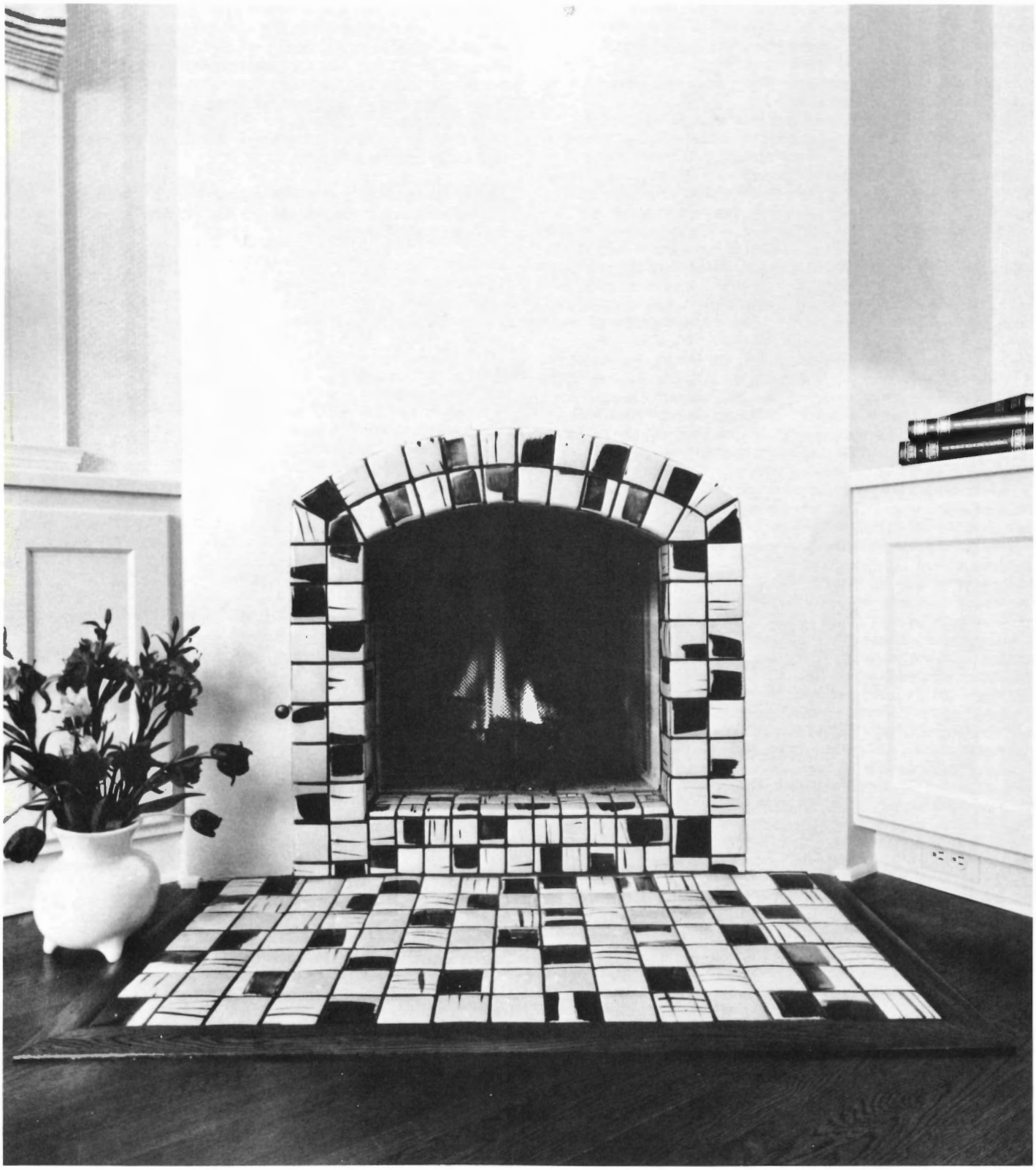
Karver adds a specific intellectual content to some pieces through inscriptions. After all, it's only a small extension from dribbled line to actual script. The words repeated around the inner walls of certain pieces—such as "Time" or "Freedom"—are verbal notations of ideas already visually expressed in the juxtaposition of surface and form. Time, for example, registers in the intervals of lines, and the question of freedom is raised by the linear web of enclosure.

The vessels are variously colored—pale blue, green with gray and yellow, rose with gray and white. Karver does not seem to have any particular purpose or message in her color choices. Color is used to visually separate wall from superimposed line, but makes no emotional or visual statement by itself.

The deep bowls seem stronger as forms than the flatter pieces, probably because their depth and the complicated juxtapositions of interior and exterior wall emphasize the three-dimensional quality in clear, strong opposition to the surface patterning. Linear complication offsetting blubbery solidity is a promising combination. Karver adeptly communicates the concept in most of her pieces, indicating that she knows what she's after. But not one of the pieces completely takes off; there is no jump across a brink of artistic unknown. Scale might do it, or perhaps making the color integral would work the magic. One hopes that Karver will find a way to take it further.

Sherry Karver lives and works in Berkeley, California and teaches ceramics at the Walnut Creek Civic Art Center and the Richmond Art Center.

Tile fireplace, (1985), porcelain, private installation.



Constance Mayeron

Mason Riddle

Constance Mayeron has been making functional ceramic ware, most of it porcelain, for nearly twelve years. But it was not until she and her family began the renovation of an abandoned, nineteenth-century St. Paul firehouse that she was prompted to make porcelain tiles. Mayeron's interest in producing tiles did not spring from a thirst to build a lucrative cottage industry on the first floor of the firehouse (now her studio), but from an urge to personalize the second floor living quarters, which she shares with her artist husband, Curtis Hoard, and their two children. Although she looked forward to designing and producing tiles for the firehouse, she never anticipated that the venture would flourish, within a few short years, into an occupation equal and parallel to her making of pots.

In virtually every area of the open-plan firehouse—living area, kitchen, bedroom, and bath—Mayeron has integrated her porcelain tiles into the overall architectural scheme, without overdoing it. Employed always in a functional capacity, the tilework developed first from a specific need and second, from any decorative concerns. It is certainly to Mayeron's credit that the tiles emerge as the aesthetic glue of the whole place, providing visual activity and continuity in an otherwise clean, minimally designed space.

Predictably, Mayeron created tiles for such traditional surfaces as counter tops, floors, walls, and stall showers, with unpredictable results. The tiles, usually measuring four inches square, are often glazed one solid color, or reveal subtle variations of a single hue which provide a shimmering effect. In the expansive firehouse kitchen, black temoku glaze counter tiles are interspersed with colored ones bearing images of fruit, offering a visual counterpoint to the white walls and blond wood cabinets and trim. One particularly effective use, from both a functional and aesthetic point of view, is an oasis of floor and wall tile that protects the immediate area surrounding the woodburning stove. Primarily jade green in color, certain of the copper-glazed tiles flashed deep red in the firing, thus animating the overall monochromatic surface.

The most striking application within the firehouse, however, is the blanket of frosty white tile that stretches the full length and width of the master bedroom suite. Gleaming and cool to both eye and touch, the purity of the expanse has been warmed by an isolated area glazed with a quasi-floral, abstract design painted by Hoard. Arguably, the white porcelain floor may be a bit austere for certain tastes, but from the point of view of design, it enlarges the somewhat long and narrow space by providing an unadulterated veil of white walls and floor, with only a change in texture.

Since the renovation of the firehouse, which also sports exterior tile wall murals painted by Hoard, Mayeron has completed numerous privately commissioned projects, all generated by word of mouth. She has produced other backdrops for woodburning stoves, a black and white checkerboard kitchen table top that matches a counter and splash board, and an elegant bath area in lustrous golden tones for an upscale Minneapolis warehouse bathroom.

In this sea of private clients, Mayeron's only public project to date is a large Donor's Wall to be installed in the lobby of a renovated St. Paul theatre, the future home of the Actors Theatre of St. Paul. Here, each donor to the renovation project has inscribed his or her name in a wet porcelain tile which will then be glazed either white or with a high fire pastel stain. Still a work in progress, the Donor's Wall stands as an innovative departure from the time-honored marble slabs chiseled with patrons' names, which adorn most cultural institutions.

During the past year, Mayeron has exhibited her various pots and tableware lines on a bed of tiles glazed to match, a development that arose from viewing her pots poised on the tile counters and floors of her home. In doing so, the work is less like isolated sculpture on pedestals, and more integrated with its a spacial environment. Curiously, one of Mayeron's more notable tile commissions was inspired by an exhibition of her stylish black and white Tuxedo Ware, displayed on coordinated tiles. Upon seeing the ware, a collector of her pots was immediately convinced that Mayeron should design the fireplace and hearth for a remodeled room in their seventy-five-year-old home.

The fireplace's design is discreet, yet its effect is spunky. Rather than dominating the space, the white tiles, embellished with gestural splashes of black, provide a spark of eccentricity in an otherwise conservatively decorated room. (The soft curve of the arch is echoed in a wall niche in the nearby kitchen, which Mayeron also designed along with the counter tops.)

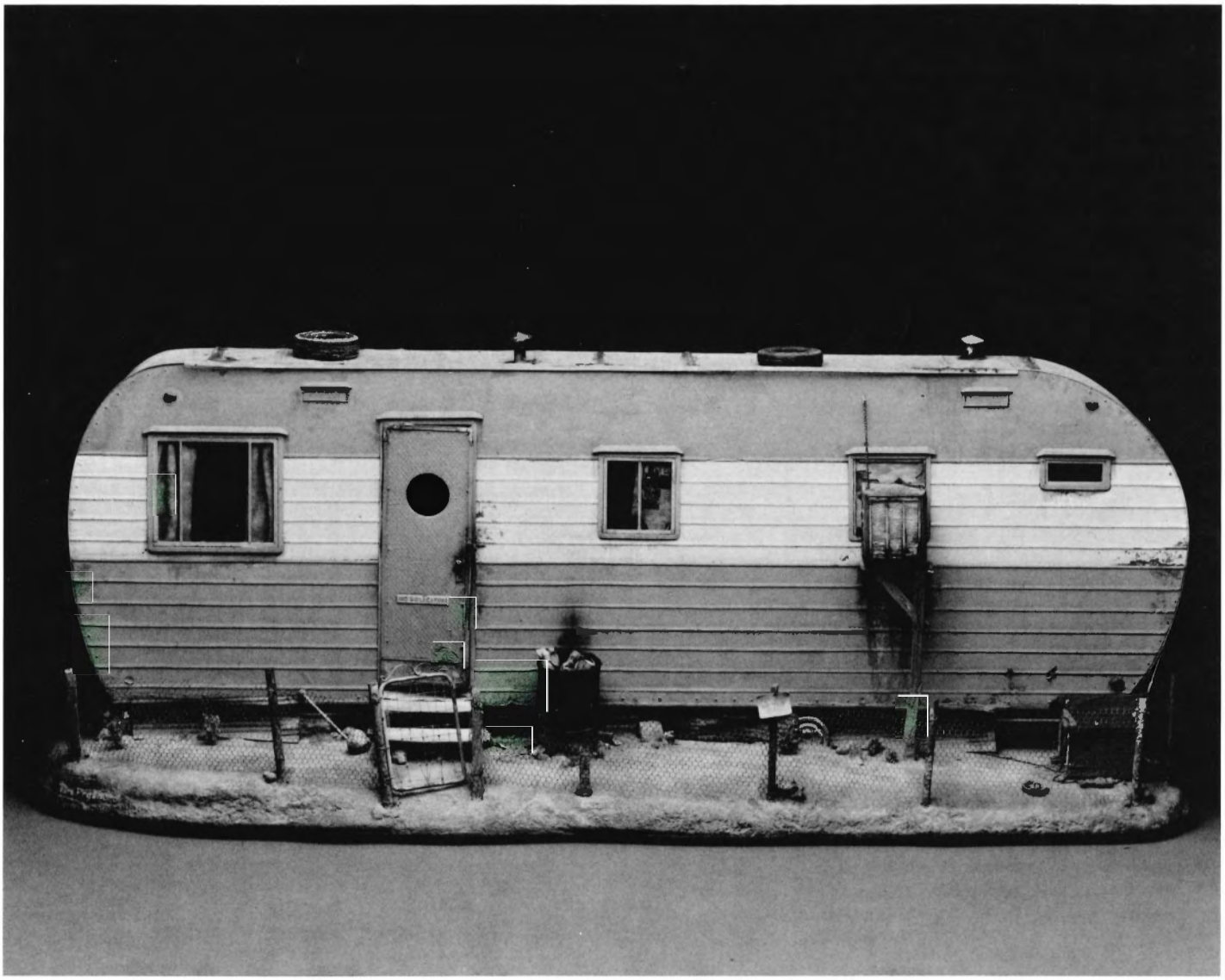
Mayeron's tiles, like her pots and tableware, are defined by an irregular, inflated look, which the artist describes as "fat and sassy." None of Mayeron's pieces would ever be mistaken as commercially manufactured: each carries a sense of design, style, and humor that elevates it far beyond the ordinary. Her tableware, whether it is the Tuxedo line or the recent, more colorful Haagen Das or Confetti patterns, manifests a casual elegance that derives from a balancing, not a perfection, of form and decoration. Mayeron says, "the Tuxedo Ware is for people who want to use sterling and cut crystal with handmade pots."

Ultimately, Mayeron's firehouse proved to be a substantial training ground in which she could experiment with nontraditional tiles in traditional ways. While her designs and glazing are not radical, neither are they slick or trendy. For the cautious client, the design and glaze of the tile never draw unwanted attention; for the more daring, her work openly defines itself, while reinforcing the architectural design of the room in which it is placed. Most importantly, Mayeron's commissioned tile projects demonstrate a thoughtful understanding of the client's needs and surrounding architectural space, without compromising the integrity or design of the work.

The work of Constance Mayeron may be seen at Martha Schneider Gallery, Chicago, and Katie Gingrass Gallery, Milwaukee.

Mason Riddle is an art historian and freelance art critic in the Twin Cities and Minnesota editor for the New Art Examiner.

Blue and White Trailer *(1983), 11" x 27" x 6", mixed media. Collection John C. Wooley, Austin, Texas. Courtesy Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York.*



Tim Prythero

Akiko Busch

Archaeologists of pre-Hispanic cultures in Mexico have observed that the Indians did not use the wheel for any practical purpose of their own until the Spanish introduced them to the wheeled cart as a means of transportation. The curious twist to this story is that among these cultures, many wheeled *toys* have been found. Our fascination with the miniature is nothing new. Nor, it seems, is the inclination to assign to it a purpose or value that may be lacking in our own lives.

While what we want or aspire to may often be larger than life, what is smaller than life is generally more easily negotiated. That is, our enchantment with the miniature has something to do with the sense of power it bestows. The more authentic the miniature object appears, the less it seems undersized, and the more the viewer becomes oversized. It doesn't look small so much as it makes us feel big. The world in miniature is more easily manoeuvered and manipulated, more easily observed and understood, and gives us likely and unlikely models from which to learn. Whether it is something as concrete and useful as a wheel, or a more abstract and subtle truth, the discoveries we make in playing with miniatures often have a value of much greater proportions.

Such, at least, is the case in "An Exhibition of Dwellings on Wheels" by Tim Prythero, a recent series of wheeled vehicles. There are eleven of them in all including an office, an old silver Airstream, and a refurbished yellow schoolbus, that occupy the Paradise Trailer Court. Seen individually or together, the midget trailers have a presence that is very close to lifesize. It is a presence that is conveyed for the most part through a reproduction of detail that is practically photographic. (Actually, it isn't. Prythero is just observant. When asked by gallery owner Craig Cornelius what he does for ideas, Prythero answered, "I just get in my truck and drive around.")

The details are what Cornelius calls "composites from the imagination." They usually describe pure and absolute clutter. But the mess varies in each of the eleven habitats and, from the looks of it, the inhabitants of each are quite different. The *Old Airstream*, for example, is the most mobile of the units so, not surprisingly, it is the least cluttered, the least decorated. Its occupants have put out the plastic webbed lawn furniture and a hibachi. The trash can even has a liner. The inhabitants of *Trailer with Bottle Fence and Cactus Planters*, on the other hand, are much more rooted, and Prythero has pointed this out with the fence surrounding their habitat. A barbed- wire and post fence has been decorated with old bottles, pieces of broken ceramics, tin cans, and a couple of old tires that have become planters for cactus plants. The dwarfed scale of the *Battleship Trailer* does nothing to undermine it as a marvel of debris. A rusted-out trash can barely contains what must be months of arbitrary tossing, and old cardboard boxes are strewn around and under the trailer. One of the supports of a dilapidated wooden chair has broken. No matter. It's been replaced by a stick and the original part is lying in the dirt where it was thrown. The trailer is propped up with a pile of old bricks, and the broken screen door has been casually repaired with a scrap of copper wire.

What prevents the trailers from straying into the realm of kitsch or parody is their sure sense of scale. The cinder blocks that prop up a corner or are used in place of real steps have been made from their own molds. The tires of the trailers themselves or those used more ornamentally as part of a fence or garden have also been made from their own molds. The screen on a door or window has been cut from a fabric whose miniscule mesh is in perfect synch with the undersized frame and knob. It's a precision that easily persuades us that, although they may be kind of small, they're still the real thing.

The precision of the downscaling also suggests that it is the result of serious observation. Take Earl and Clara's (as noted by the small sign) *Pink and White Trailer*. A tiny awning of green corrugated plastic is above the doorway. It's been repeated on the roof of the dog house, the roof of the bird house, the trim beneath the trailer—even the cinderblocks under the trailer have been painted a matching green. But this isn't satirical; you don't pay this kind of attention to something unless you care about it. Earl and Clara may be *having* fun, but they're not making it.

But it is more than a precise sense of scale that makes the pieces genuine. What we see is a perfect reproduction not only of objects, but of the way they have been used. A miniature sense of decay has settled here. The aluminum siding on a six-inch door has been stained where dozens of hands have reached for the knob. A leak in an old hose stains the ground. A three-inch swamp cooler has dripped down over the roof and discolored the siding, and the desert heat has caused the paint to buckle. The process of aging has been faultlessly reënacted, and this is what most separates Prythero's work from simple modelmaking.

Trailers, Airstreams, mobile homes—all of these embody two of the more celebrated American Dreams: owning your own home and mobility, going west, moving on. You *can* have it all and you *can* take it with you. The Paradise Trailer Court seems to be saying that the dream has become smaller and a little older, but that it is nonetheless real.

Tim Prythero's work was exhibited at Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York, and in February at the Santa Fe Fine Arts Museum.

Akiko Busch is a freelance writer and editor living in New York City.

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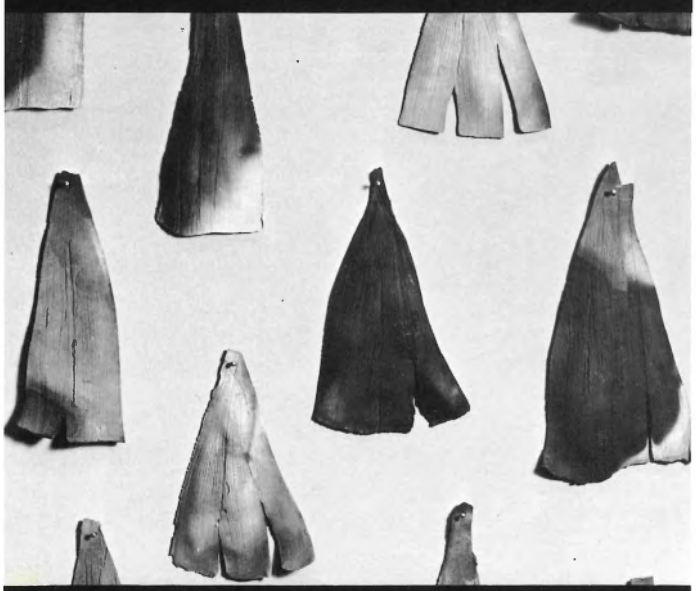

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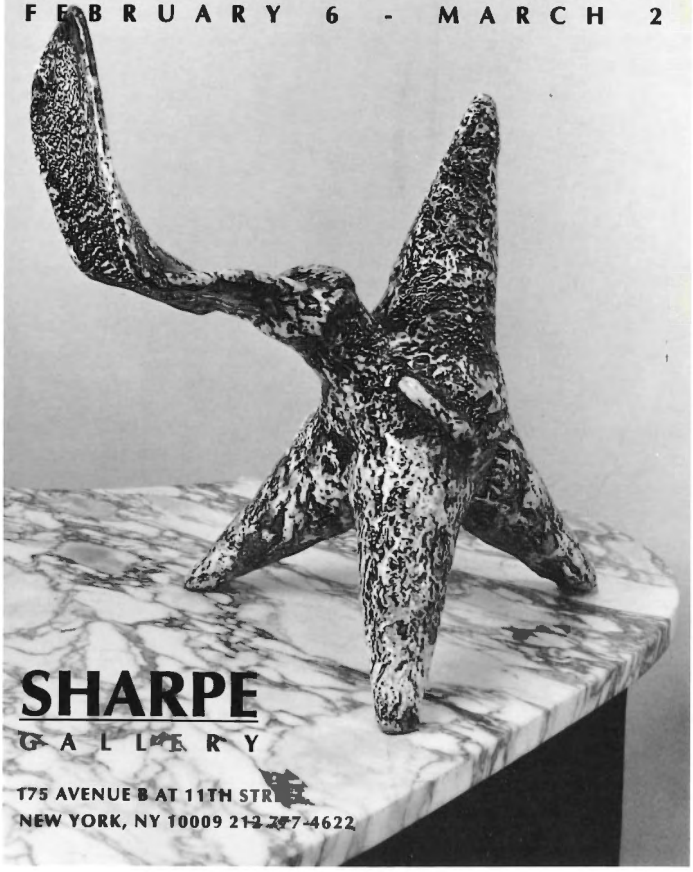

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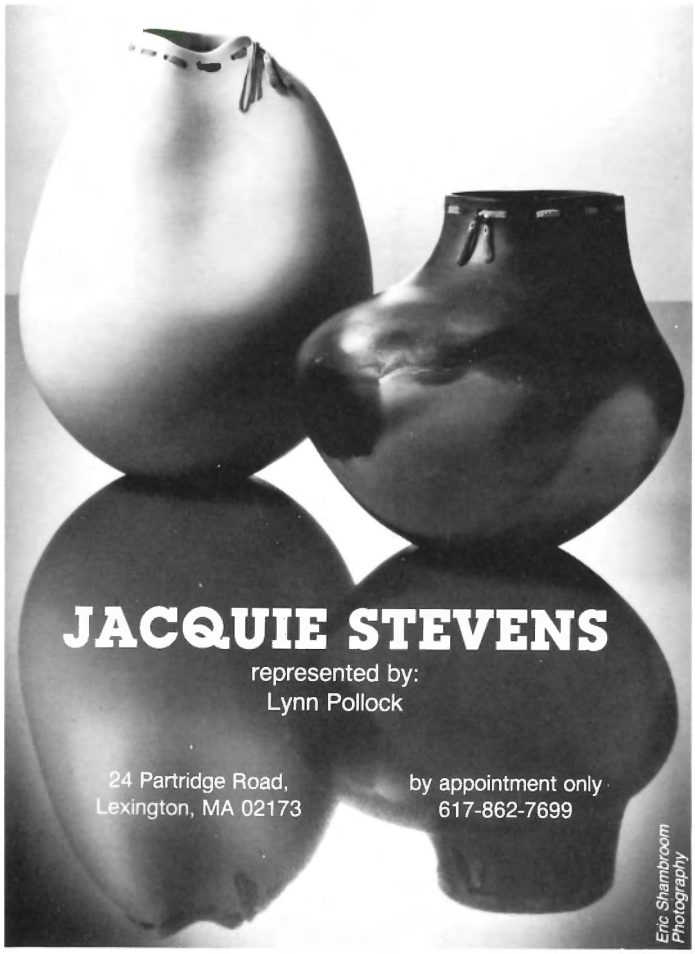

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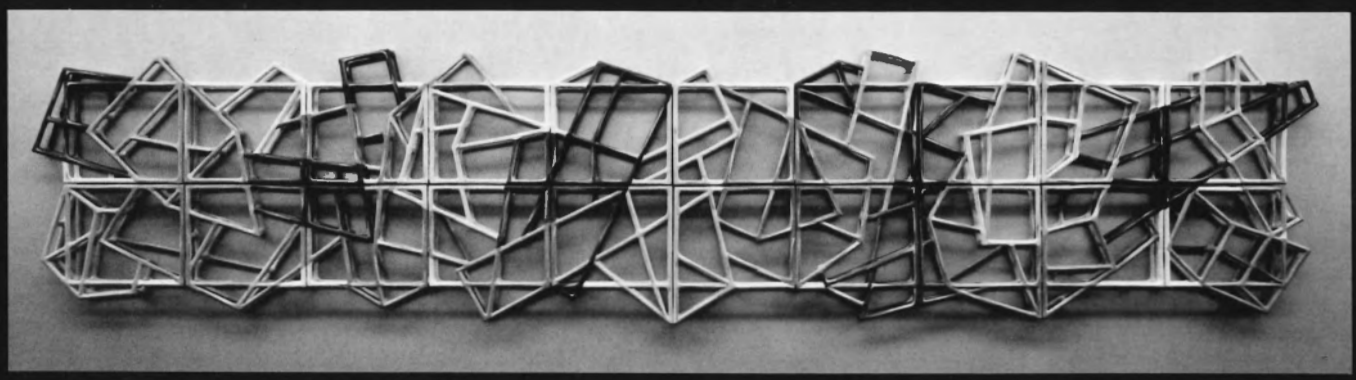

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MAURINE LITTLETON GALLERY

Ceramic Invitational

February 13 — March 7, 1986

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Graham Marks
Christopher Richard
Toshiko Takaezu
James Tanner
New Work by Don Reitz

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Washington, D.C. 20007

Tuesday—Saturday
12—6 P.M.
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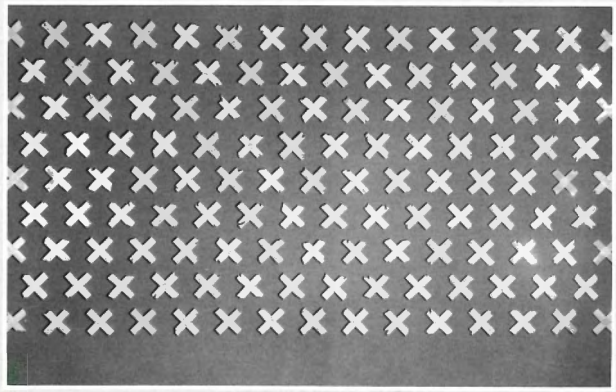
TETKOWSKI

Museum of Modern Art, Kogeikan, Tokyo
Permanent Collection
Free Fall Vista (1982), Diameter 31"



Georgia Sartoris

131 White X's
Low-fire white clay, glazed, with iridescent lustre
15 ft. x 9 ft. x 1"
Installation: Denver Art Museum, Colorado Biennial 1984

Exhibition Dates: February 20–March 29

Robischon Gallery

1122 E. 17th Avenue, Denver, Colorado 303/832 8899

An exposition of galleries featuring works in clay, glass, wood, fiber, metal and mixed media. September 19-22, 1986, Navy Pier, Chicago. Opening Night Benefit, September 18, 1986, 5:30 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. The Chicago International New Art Forms Exposition is a juried event. Limited space available. Application and information inquiries from galleries or fine arts dealers call or write Mark Lyman, Managing Director, Chicago International New Art Forms Exposition, 600 North McClurg Court, Suite 1302, Chicago, IL 60611 USA. Telephone: 312.787.6858 Telex: 333427 Lakeside Group

CHICAGO
International New Art Forms
EXPOSITION

Projects of the Lakeside Group: The Chicago International Art Exposition, The Chicago International Antiques Show, The Chicago International Wooden Boat Festival, The Chicago International Sailboat Show, The Chicago International Flower and Garden Show.

February 8–
March 16, 1986

Pittsburgh Center
for the Arts

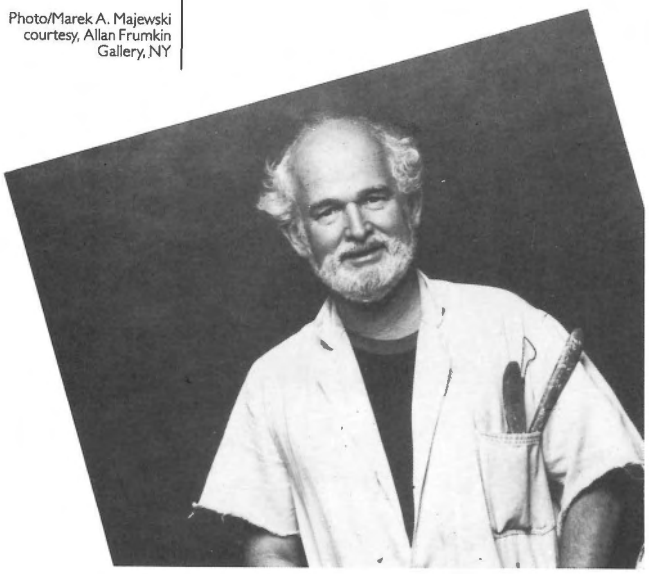
Mellon Park
6300 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania
15232

(412) 361-0873

Photo/Marek A. Majewski
courtesy, Allan Frumkin
Gallery, NY

ROBERT ARNESON

Points of View



Texans Past and Present
An Exhibition of
Contemporary Ceramic Work

John Harmon
Suzanne Klotz-Reilly
Catherine Lee
Mike Moseley
Curtis Ripley
Robert Shay
Rudolph Staffel
Sara Waters

March 3–March 28
The Gallery of the University of Texas at San Antonio

The University of Texas
at San Antonio
College of Fine Arts and Humanities
Art Teaching Gallery
San Antonio, Texas 78285 512/691 4391
Gallery Director: Mauricio Gonzalez

February 14–March 15
Don Bendel
Ceramic Sculpture

March 21–April 19
Michael Cadieux
Paintings

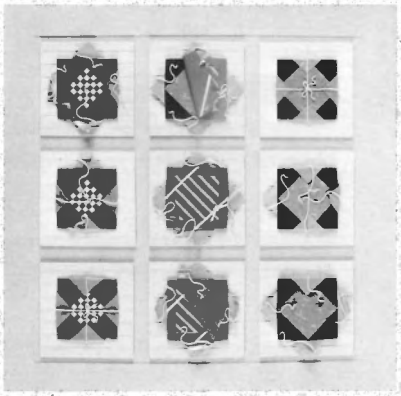
April 26—May 24
Jay Markel
Sculpture

May 30–June 28
Don Reitz
Clay Works

Leedy/Voulkos Gallery
1919 Wyandotte
Kansas City, Missouri
64108
816 474 1919

Martha Schneider Gallery
2055 Green Bay Road
Highland Park IL 60035
312/433 4420

Porcelain/Raku
January 18–February 13



Carole Aoki
Porcelain

Karl Borgeson
Raku

Frank Boyden

April 3–27

Lawrence Gallery

842 SW 1st
Portland, Oregon 97204
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THE CERAMICS OF BETTY WOODMAN

DECEMBER 15–JANUARY 26

20 Page
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Essay by Jeff Perrone

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The Freedman Gallery is supported in part by grants
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MARCH 21–APRIL 19

JUN KANEKO

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Karen Koblitz

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March 14–April 21

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(213) 658 1044

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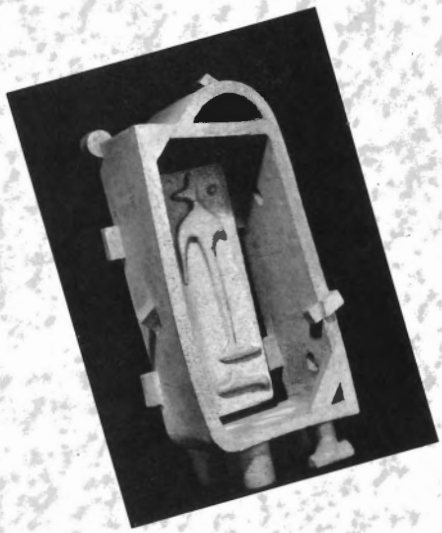
Eric Nelson
February 6–March 1



TRAVER SUTTON GALLERY

2219 Fourth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98121
206/448 4234

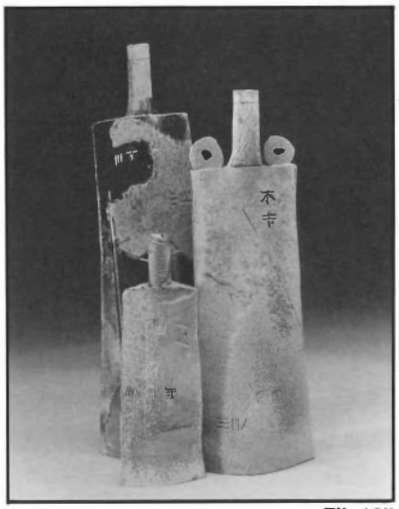
Kakemono (1985), 19″ x 8″ x 8″, ceramic.
Photo: Paul M. Macapia.

Clay for Collectors IV
December 30–February 6

Political Art '86
Clay
Dale Dapkins
James Dugas
Dawn Fisher
Peter Gourfain
Richard Lipscher
Kirk Mangus
Jeff Schlanger
February 8–March 20

Ceramics by Mary Jo Peden
Rose Cabat
Andrea Gill
Karen Karnes
Susan Kemenyffy
Mary Rogers
Judith Salomon
Suzanne Stephenson
Toshiko Takaezu
Paul Winokur
April 17–May 15

The Clay Place
5600 Walnut Street
Pittsburgh PA 15232
Telephone: 412 441 3799



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John Ward

March–April

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Marian Gaunce
Nicole Johns
Ursula Morley Price
Lucie Rie
Mary Rogers
Geoffrey Swindell
Angela Verdon

Main Floor Gallery

GRAHAM

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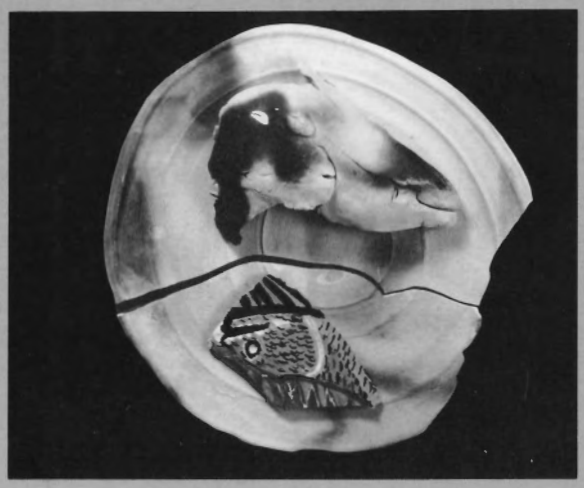
Hours: Tuesday–Saturday 10–5

Cliff Mendelson

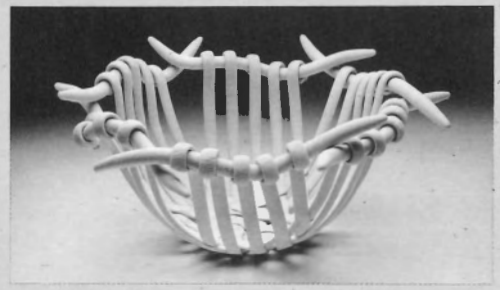
January 28–February 21



Ceramic wall piece, untitled, 22" x 22" x 4"

Jane Hartsook Gallery
Greenwich House Pottery
16 Jones Street NYC 212/242/4106

MARIAN HAIGH-NEAL



JUDY YOUENS
PERCEPTION
GALLERIES

2631 Colquitt
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Bone Basket (1985), 11" x 22", glazed stoneware.
Photo: Phyllis Frede.

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Photo: Courtney Frisse

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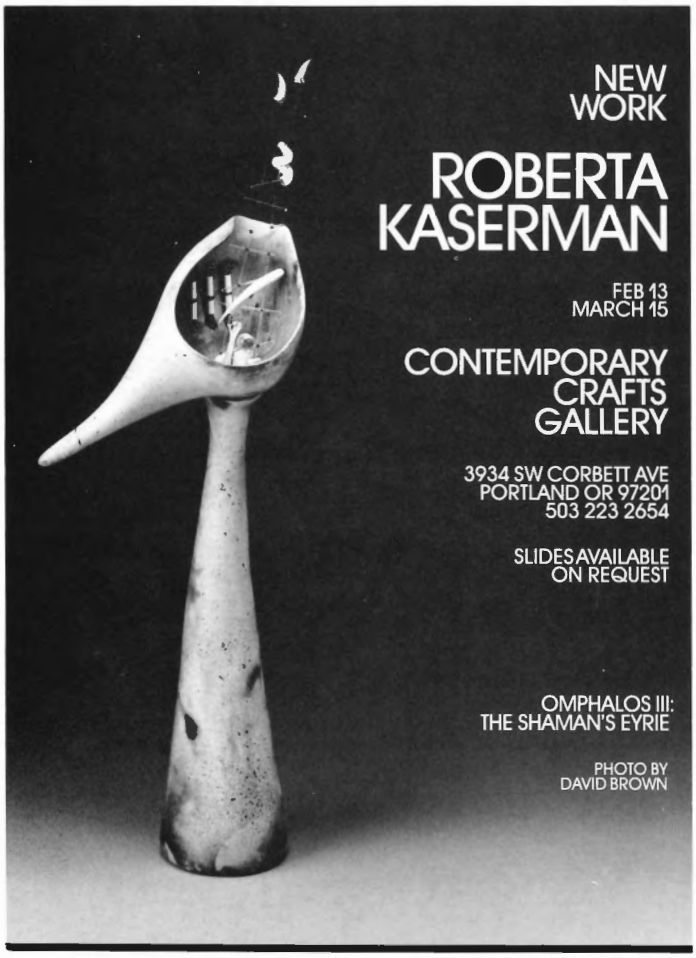
35th Exhibition
Juror: Rina Peleg

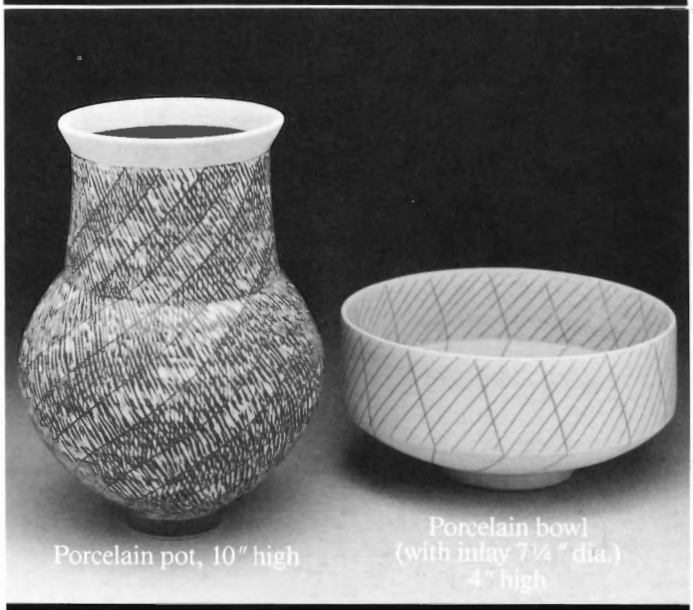
Out of Hand
January 31–February 28
Artists' reception:
February 2, 3:00–5:00

Everson Museum
401 Harrison
Syracuse, NY 13202
315/474 6064



JULIAN STAIR

April 5–26, 1986



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MATERIAL AND METAPHOR

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Christina Bertoni
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Aurore Chabot
Tony Costanzo
Christopher Davis-Benavides
Stephen De Staebler
Bill Farrell
Ronald Fondaw
Viola Frey
Andrea Gill
John Goodheart
Tony Hepburn
Linda Kramer
Michael Lucero
Graham Marks
Kenneth Price
John Roloff
Richard Shaw
Paul Soldner
Toshiko Takaezu
Irvin Tepper
Betty Woodman
Arnold Zimmerman

February 1 — March 29

The Chicago Public Library • Cultural Center • 78 East Washington Street

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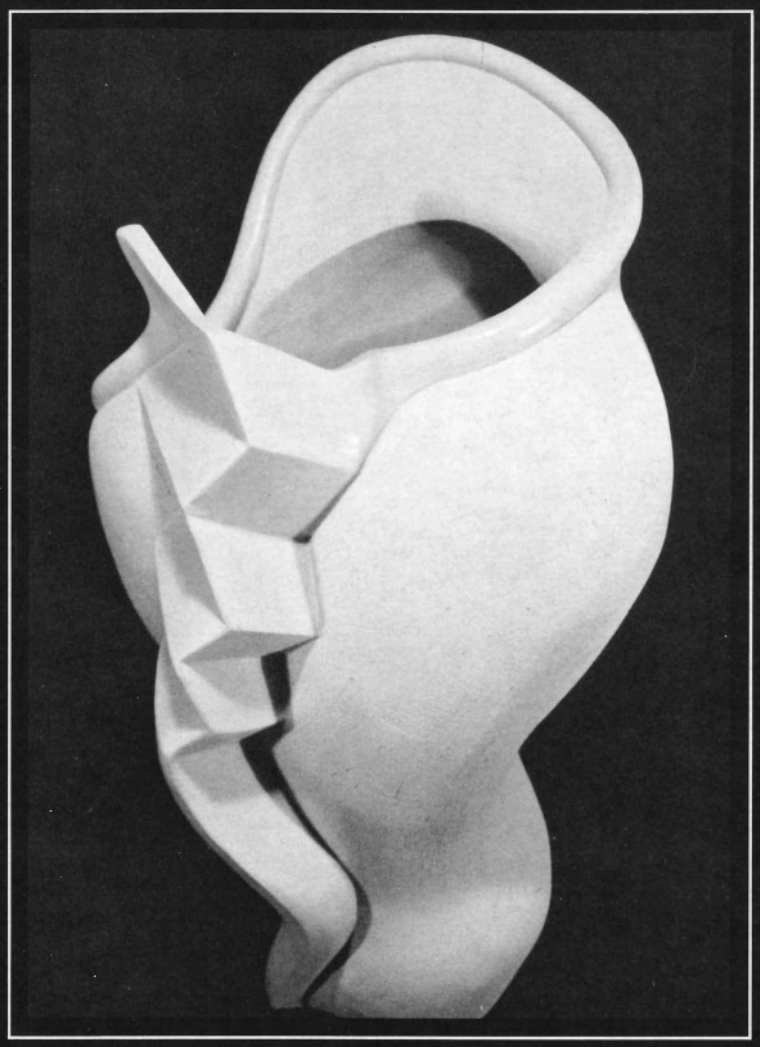
For information on related programs: 312/744-6630. Catalog available.

HUDSON RIVER GALLERY



Betty (1985), 38″ x 30″, terra sigillata coated earthenware, coil-built.

John Volpacchio
February 9–March 7

217 Main Street Ossining, NY 10562 914/762 5300

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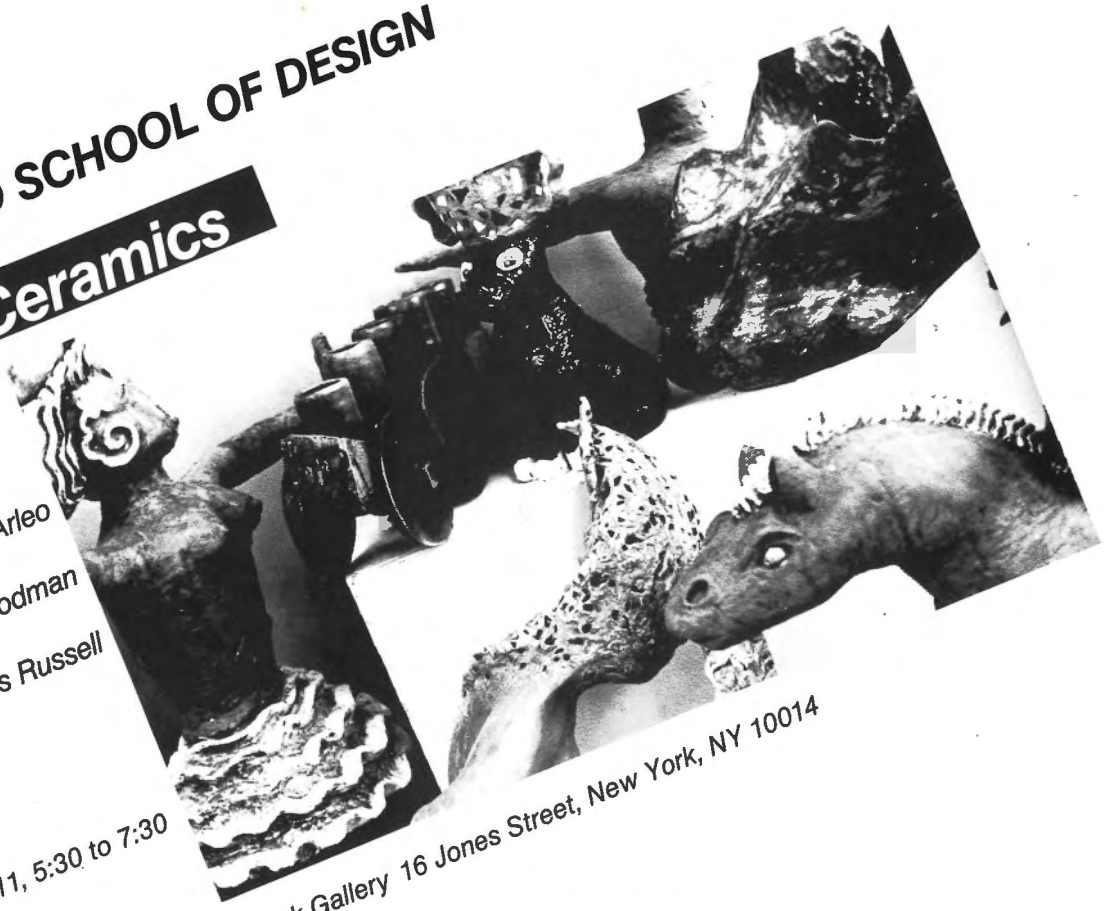
Ceramics



Exhibitors:
MFA Candidates

Adrian Arleo
Sally Goodman
Thomas Russell

March 11-27, 1986

Opening Reception: March 11, 5:30 to 7:30

Exhibition at Greenwich House Pottery, Jane Hartsook Gallery 16 Jones Street, New York, NY 10014

Gallery Hours: 1-5 pm Tuesday through Saturday

RISD Ceramics Faculty (not exhibiting): Jacquelyn Rice, Jan Holcomb, Larry Bush

Summer Clay Workshop '86 in Providence June 23 to August 1, 1986

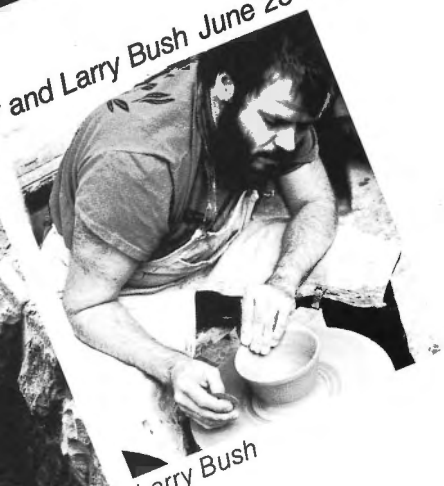
Featuring:

Jeffrey Ostreich June 23 to July 11 Akio Takamori July 14 to August 1 Anne Currier and Larry Bush June 23 to August 1

Jeffrey Ostreich

Akio Takamori

Anne Currier



Larry Bush

For more information on Summer Clay, call RISD at 401-331-3511 (ext. 282), or write RISD/CE, Two College Street, Providence, RI 02903

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year round gallery exhibition schedule

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southwest craft center and University of Texas at San Antonio

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Viola Frey
Patti Warashina
Michael Simon
John Glick
Ron Nagle
Rudy Staffel
Tom Coleman

SPECIAL GUEST LECTURER
Jack Lenor Larsen

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:
Robert Hughes
Art Critic, *Time Magazine*; Author, *Shock of the New*

John Glick Workshop
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San Antonio, TX 78205
512 224-1848

REGISTRATION:
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NCECA
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June 16–August 22

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Elmer Taylor
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Site: John Roloff
Woodfire: Paul Chaleff

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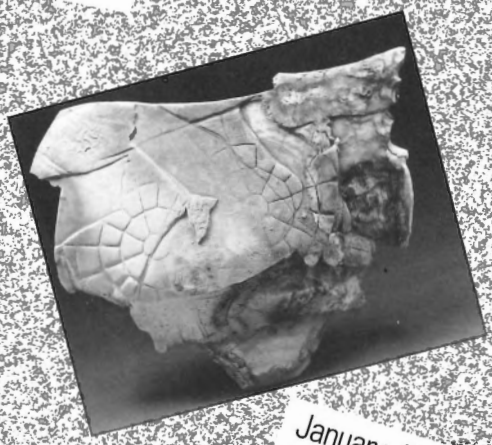
SUSAN CUMMINS GALLERY



January 13–February 15
Paul Soldner
Photo: Mel Schockner

February 17–March 15
Annette Corcoran
Photo: Lee Hocker

32B Miller Avenue
Mill Valley, California 94941
(415) 383-1512

A.R.T. National Claybox Show

April 11–May 11, 1986
Opening receptions:
April 11, Friday, 5–8pm
April 13, Sunday, 1–3pm

Jurors:
John Glick
William Hunt
Martha Schneider

A.R.T. Gallery
1555 Louis Avenue
Elk Grove, Illinois 60007
312/593 6060

Gallery hours:
Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm
Sat, 10am–2pm

For further information, write to:
Sam Rosby, Gallery Director

Christine Federighi
William Schaaf

Individual work and collaboration
April 4—26, 1986

Gloria Luria Gallery

1033 Kane Concourse / Bay Harbor Islands, Florida 33154

Barbara Frey
Slide Lecture March 6, 1986

Dallas Craft Guild
Kramer Center
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Dallas, Texas 75230
214 363 5480

Call or write for more information.

Bonnie J. Katz

Rebecca Brenner

March 21–April 25

Objects Gallery
341 West Superior Street
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312 664 6622

Figurative Ceramics Southeast
February 7–March 5

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Joe Bova
Christine Federighi
Emily Gassenheimer
Andy Nasisse
Ted Saupe
Triesch Voelker

Fay Gold Gallery
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Atlanta, Georgia 30305
404/233 3843

John Roloff
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Suzanne Adan
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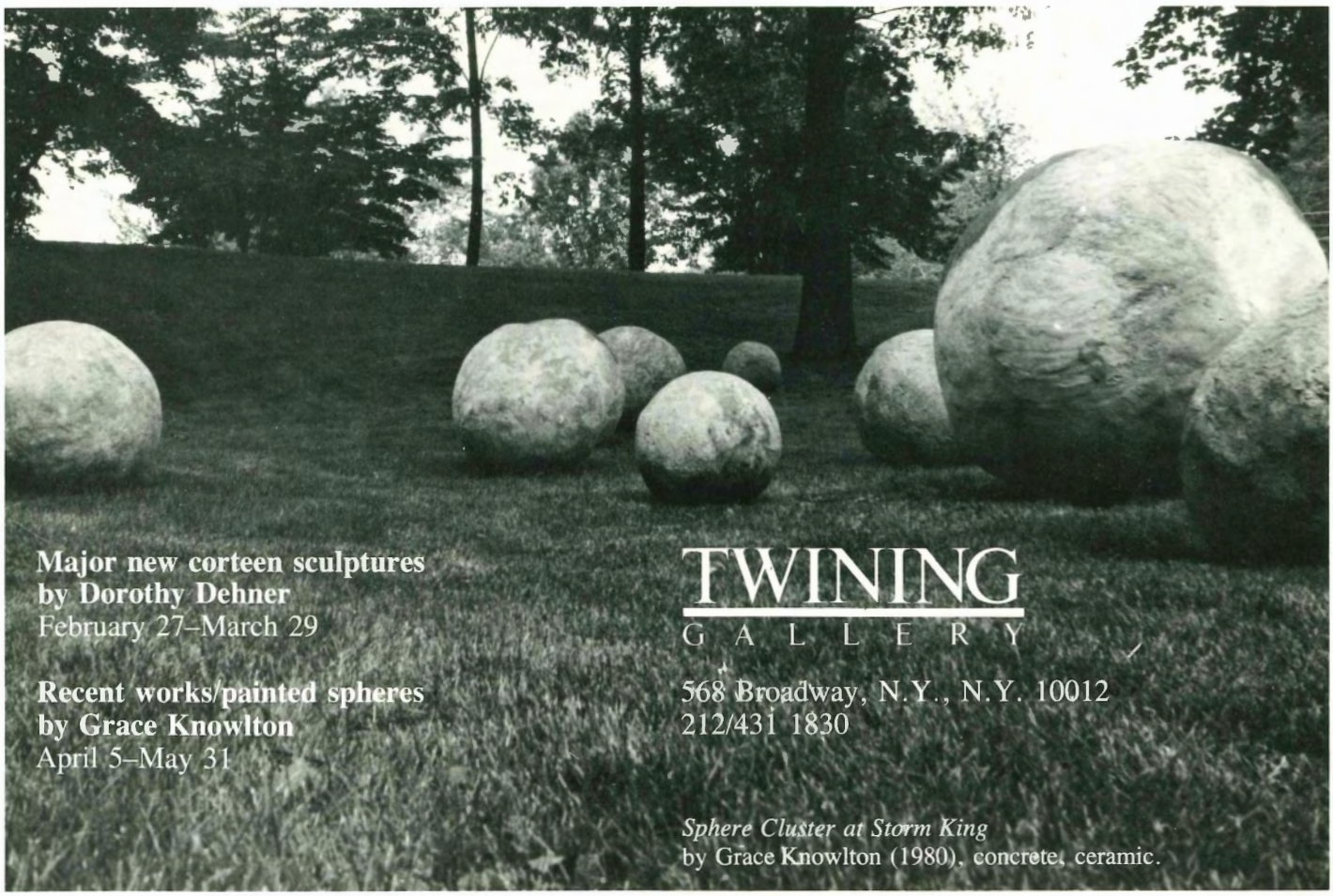
April 23–May 24, 1986
Reception: April 26, 7–9pm

Himovitz/Salomon Gallery
1020 Tenth Street
Sacramento CA 95814
916/448 8723



Major new corteen sculptures by Dorothy Dehner
February 27–March 29

Recent works/painted spheres by Grace Knowlton
April 5–May 31

TWINING
GALLERY

568 Broadway, N.Y., N.Y. 10012
212/431 1830

Sphere Cluster at Storm King
by Grace Knowlton (1980), concrete, ceramic.

Michael Lucero

April 5-26

Charles Cowles Gallery

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Peter Voulkos

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Herman Albert
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March

Betty Woodman

Peter Chevalier
Paintings and Drawings
April

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Paul Pratchenko
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February

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March

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April

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